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Critical Buddhism

Engaging with Modern Japanese Buddhist Thought

JAMES MARK SHIELDS

CRITICAL BUDDHISM

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the relative calm world of Japanese Buddhist scholarship was thrown into chaos with the publication of several works by Buddhist scholars Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shiro, dedicated to the promotion of something they called Critical Buddhism (hihan bukkyo). In their quest to re-establish a "true"—rational, ethical and humanist—form of East Asian Buddhism, the Critical Buddhists undertook a radical deconstruction of historical and contemporary East Asian Buddhism, particularly Zen.

While their controversial work has received some attention in English-language scholarship, this is the first book-length treatment of Critical Buddhism as both a philosophical and religious movement, where the lines between scholarship and practice blur. Providing a critical and constructive analysis of Critical Buddhism, particularly the epistemological categories of critica and topica, this book examines contemporary theories of knowledge and ethics in order to situate Critical Buddhism within modern Japanese and Buddhist thought as well as in relation to current trends in contemporary Western thought.

For Sachiko, in time

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List of Abbreviations

AT	*Œuvres de Descartes*. 12 volumes. Edited by C. Adam and P. Tannery. Revised edition. Paris: Vrin / CNRS, 1964–76.
BNS	*Brahma Net Sutra* (Sk. *Brahmajāla-sūtra*; Jp. *Bonmōkyō*)
Ch.	Chinese language
DDB	*Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*
Dhp.	*Dhammapada* (Sk. *Dharmapāda*; Jp. *Hokku kyō*)
Fr.	French language
G.	*Shōbōgenzō*
Gr.	German language
Jp.	Japanese language
L.	*Lunyu* (Jp. *Rongo*)
Lt.	Latin language
MMK	*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*
NS	Nirvāṇa Sutra (Sk. *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*; Jp. *Dai nehan kyō*)
Rin.	*Rinzairoku*
S.	*A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, by William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous
SCAP	Supreme Commander Allied Powers
Sk.	Sanskrit language
T	*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*

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Introduction

> Critique does not exhaust religion, but religion that cannot critique is already dead.
>
> Robert Ackermann, *Religion as Critique*, p. 1

In the past several decades, and particularly since a succession of traumatic events in the early to mid-1990s—the bursting of the economic bubble, the Great Hanshin Earthquake, and the Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway—Japan has witnessed a re-emergence of debate about the meaning of modernity, as well as the role of religion in modern life. As early as a decade prior to the beginning of the present economic crisis, however, movement towards cultural re-evaluation had already begun. A startling claim made by Machida Muneo, then-president of the Buddhist Federation of Japan (Zen Nihon Bukkyō Kai) and secretary general of the Sōtō Zen sect, unwittingly helped to galvanize a new movement of self-conscious criticism within Japanese Buddhist scholarship. Machida proclaimed to those gathered at the 3rd World Conference on Religion and Peace (1979) that there was, in fact, no social discrimination of any sort in Japan. Machida's comments were directed against a proposed draft of the findings of the WCRPIII Commission on Religion and Human Rights, Dignity, Responsibility, and Rights, which read, "We should all be deeply concerned with the plight of people such as the Burakumin of Japan and the Untouchables of India." Decrying this as an unsubstantiated stain on Japanese national honor, Machida managed to convince his fellow delegates to rewrite the statement thus: "We should all be deeply concerned with the plight of people such as the so-called untouchables."[1] These remarks, coupled with a perceived rise in the rhetoric of "Japanism" (*Nihonshugi*) in the 1980s, planted the seeds of discontent among a number of scholars, which in turn broke into a full-fledged storm in 1985, with the publication of several essays by two Komazawa University Buddhist scholars affiliated with Machida's own Sōtō Zen sect—Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shirō—thus bringing to birth a movement known as Critical Buddhism (*hihan bukkyō*). Although the writings of Matsumoto and Hakamaya diverge at certain points, both in style (Matsumoto the more cautious, Hakamaya more vitriolic), and in substance (Matsumoto tends to focus on more specific problems in Buddhist doctrine, Hakamaya, while also attending to such, draws a much larger net, and seems to be more concerned with

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[1] To his credit, and the surprise of many, Machida gave a dramatic apology for his earlier comments at the next WCRP, held in Kenya in 1984; see William Bodiford, "Zen and the Art of Religious Prejudice: Efforts to Reform a Tradition of Social Discrimination," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 23 (1996): pp. 1–28.

social issues), I will for the most part treat Critical Buddhism as a single category, housing numerous arguments and foci, without specifically relating each to one or the other of its founding fathers.

In a forthright manner rare to modern Japanese academia, Hakamaya and Matsumoto proceeded to launch a full frontal assault against not only past and present advocates of Japanese particularism and various wartime Buddhist leaders who collaborated with the wartime regime, but also prominent Japanese philosophical figures (e.g., Nishida Kitarō and the Kyoto School of philosophy), specific Buddhist doctrines (e.g., *tathāgata-garbha* [Jp. *nyoraizō*] and "original enlightenment" [Jp. *hongaku*]), and even entire sects (e.g., Zen), all of which were judged by the Critical Buddhists to be lacking in certain "critical" criteria, thus forfeiting any and all claims to being "truly Buddhist." The ferment reached a peak in the early 1990s, with the publication of Hakamaya's *Hongaku shisō hihan* (Critique of the Doctrine of Original Enlightenment, 1989), *Hihan bukkyō* (Critical Buddhism, 1990), *Dōgen to bukkyō* (Dōgen and Buddhism, 1992), and Matsumoto's *Engi to kū: Nyoraizō shisō hihan* (*Pratītya-samutpāda*[2] and Emptiness: Critiques of the Doctrine of *Tathāgata-garbha*, 1989) and *Zen shisō no hihanteki kenkyū* (Critical Studies on Zen Thought, 1993), followed by a session at the American Academy of Religion's 1993 meeting in Washington, DC, entitled "Critical Buddhism: Issues and Responses to a New Methodological Movement," out of which emerged the English-language collection of essays, *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (1994). As with all storms, this one, we are tempted to say, eventually passed the critical stage. Indeed, looking back now, with nearly two decades hindsight, the Critical Buddhist movement seems to have had little effect beyond the academy; even within such, its lasting effects seem minimal. This is lamentable, because Critical Buddhism, for all its flaws and inadequacies—or perhaps *because* of such—raises a number of important issues for Buddhism, Buddhist studies, and the modern study of religion.

Dan Lusthaus says that Critical Buddhism "was inevitable [and] necessary… [as] the inevitable revisiting of a theme that has been central to Buddhism since its onset."[3]According to such a reading, the tradition of self-conscious criticism in historical Buddhism finds full flower in this recent movement. Yet Critical Buddhism is also very much a child of its time, our time: its particular motivations and intent are, however related, ultimately distinct from those of Buddhist

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[2] *Pratītya-samutpāda* is usually rendered in English as "co-dependent arising" or "dependent origination," neither of which sufficiently convey the nuances of this important term. The Japanese equivalent, *engi*, similarly fails to convey the full Indian sense, particularly as the word has come to mean, in ordinary Japanese, something like the English "omen." For these reasons in this study I have chosen to leave it in the Sanskrit.

[3] Dan Lusthaus, "Critical Buddhism and Returning to the Sources," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 30.

reformers of the past.[4] As Patrick Smith points out in his "reinterpretation" of Japan on the brink of the millennium, there is a palpable sense of ethical and institutional crisis in the Land of the Rising Sun, certainly compounded by the now nearly two decades-long economic slump. Though the infamous Machida Incident has been cited as the spark that ignited Critical Buddhism, the postwar rise of New Religious Movements such as Sōka Gakkai, and, more disturbingly, the terrorist cult Aum Shinrikyō, combined with the re-emergence of nationalist sentiment among political leaders and academics—in short, the broader socio-cultural conditions of the past several decades—provided a more fundamental catalyst for criticism within and by contemporary Japanese Buddhism. Central to the project of Critical Buddhism is the simple question of whether Buddhism can co-exist, let alone flourish, in today's world. Certainly, North American Buddhism has proven itself sustainable, even marketable; meanwhile in East and Southeast Asia many young people are turning not only to New Religious Movements but to Western religions like Christianity for answers to their spiritual questions. And in twenty-first-century Japan, Buddhism has become, for all intents and purposes, a dead religion. As Japanologist Donald Keene remarked several decades ago: "As far as religion goes, one would have to look very hard to find in Japan even as much fervor as exists in [the USA], let alone India … real interest in [Buddhism] is comparatively unusual."[5]

This may sound like a strong claim, which might too readily gloss the differences in the conception, display, and acknowledgment of "religion" in the two cultures, but it bears consideration. Contrary to lingering Western stereotypes of Japan as a nation of geisha, samurai, and meditating monks, Buddhism has little direct impact on the lives of ordinary Japanese people (as opposed to, say, *karaoke* or the ubiquitous *keitai*). Indeed, Buddhism in Japan today is frequently referred to as "funerary Buddhism" (*sōshiki bukkyō*) since preparation for death seems to be the sole remaining office it provides to the vast majority of people. In this way, we might draw parallels with the effects of Christianity in certain European countries, where the religion serves largely as a ceremonial vehicle at certain key junctures in one's life: birth, marriage, death (ironically, in Japan Christianity also plays the role of wedding-provider for many, while Shinto covers the events of birth). Of course the argument is often made, by Japanese and foreigners alike, that Buddhism has seeped into Japanese culture in ways that are subtle but nonetheless real and deep. While this is, at one level, true, since Buddhism, intermingled with elements of Shinto and Confucianism, played an important role in the development of Japanese culture, it is a claim usually associated with more dubious assertions about the "Japanese mind" or Japanese sensibility that are without substance. Moreover, not only is there very little interaction between Buddhism and modern

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[4] See Jacqueline Stone, "Review Article: Some Reflections on Critical Buddhism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 26/1–2 (1999): p. 168.

[5] Donald Keene, "Introduction" to Dazai Osamu, *The Setting Sun* (New York, 1956), pp. ix–x.

Japanese social life, there are socially-constructed barriers preventing such. One contemporary cleric of the Jōdo Shin sect remarks: "In order to keep Buddhism sacred enough to serve the deceased, people do not seem to want Buddhist monks to do secular activities, especially like getting involved in politics."[6]

The single biggest issue raised by Critical Buddhism involves the meaning of Buddhism itself. What does it mean to identify something or someone as "Buddhist" or, for that matter, "non-Buddhist"? At the basic substantive level, there are a few teachings or doctrines that we can point to as common to most if not all forms of Buddhism: the Three Marks (*tri-dṛṣṭi-namitta-mudrā*; Jp. *sanbōin*) of impermanence (*anityā-bata-saṃskārāḥ*; Jp. *shogyōmujō*), no-self (*anātman*; Jp. *muga*) and *nirvāṇa* or awakening (Jp. *nehan*; *satori*), the Four Noble Truths (*ārya-satya*; Jp. *shitai*) and the Eightfold Path (*āryāṣṭānga-mārga*; Jp. *hasseidō*) being the most obvious and widely-known. More specifically, the Mahāyāna (Jp. *Daijō*) manifests certain key doctrines or beliefs, of which we might name four:

1. All things are impermanent and constantly changing;
2. All things are selfless;
3. *Nirvāṇa* or enlightenment is some form of release or extinction;
4. Compassion is a virtue.

Of course, various branches of the Mahāyāna have emphasized these four "truths" in different ways and have developed innumerable ways to integrate them as practice, but there remains a remarkable consistency at the level of doctrine. Indeed, as we shall see, Critical Buddhism places great emphasis on adherence to certain key Buddhist doctrines, particularly those that have emerged from Buddhist lines influenced by Mahāyāna, and, more particularly, Mādhyamika streams. However, their choice of doctrines is bound by a seemingly deeper criterion—*criticalism*. Reflection and exploration of this key term, along with its supposed mirror opposite, *topicalism*, will form the bulk of my investigations here.

At first glance, as with most "insider" interpretations of religion, Hakamaya and Matsumoto seem to hold to an ahistorical or idealized conception of Buddhism. However, despite the fact that their language sometimes implies otherwise, we would be mistaken to conclude that they—like so many of their Meiji "New Buddhist" forebears—presume a certain originary Buddhism that existed at one time but has been lost, ravaged by the accidents of history and culture.[7] At any rate, such grasping onto what Michel Foucault called the "ideality of origins" could easily be deconstructed from a Buddhist perspective.[8] Matsumoto makes his opposition

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6 *Japan Times*, 3 January 2002, p. 3.

7 New Buddhism (*shin bukkyō*) is a term applied to a loose assemblage of "modernist" movements in Japan from the 1880s through the 1910s.

8 See, e.g., Dale Wright, *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 59; Paul J. Griffiths, "The Limits of Criticism," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L.

to such an approach plain when he states that Critical Buddhists must be willing to criticize even the *teachings of the Buddha* (or what are presumed to be), if they seem to contradict certain inviolable doctrines such as *pratītya-samutpāda* or *anātman*. Thus, within Critical Buddhism we see an outright dismissal of any attempt to define Buddhism as a religion either *historically*—as a culturally-embedded set of ideas and values shaped entirely by personalities and the impact of political and social realities; *ideally*—as the trans-historical continuation of an original essence located either in the Dharma, Buddha, or Sangha; or *progressively*—as the unfolding of truth over time or the progressive clarification of a particular set of doctrines and practices. None of these, by themselves, can offer us a picture of "true Buddhism."

In Critical Buddhist interpretation, Buddhism, i.e., *true Buddhism*, resides not in history, not even in the history or teachings of Śākyamuni, the "historical Buddha," but in *criticism*, based on a rigid adherence to several essential Buddhist doctrines—and thus not, as in Hakamaya's over-simplified mantra, "criticism alone." Indeed, as Peter Gregory remarks, despite their apparent anti-foundationalism, there is an *essence* upon which Critical Buddhism rests.[9] Gregory uses this to question whether so-called Critical Buddhists are truly "critical"—though it is hard to imagine any type of thought, criticism, or expression without some sort of foundation; perhaps the point is rather to analyze how a particular foundation is conceived and applied. As I will show in this study, "criticalism" is best understood less as a pure form of critical rationality than as a type of hermeneutical praxis rooted in specific Buddhist and Western philosophical theories of language, epistemology, and ethics.

Given the above, and Hakamaya and Matsumoto's claims to be locating a "true Buddhism," we might ask, as many of their critics do: are the Critical Buddhists themselves, in their insistence on locating Buddhist truth in language, reason, and criticism, themselves guilty of misrepresenting Buddhism? Or have they fallen into the trap of "conceptual thinking," so often condemned within the Mahāyāna, and especially Zen traditions? While it would be hard to defend Hakamaya and Matsumoto on this latter point, even Abe Masao (1915–2006), whose work is far removed from Critical Buddhism, admits that "in Zen, the positive and creative aspects of human thinking have been neglected and only its dualistic and discriminating aspects have been clearly realized as something to be overcome."[10] This matter is further complicated by the difficulties in distinguishing the tradition (or traditions) from common interpretations or misunderstandings of such. In

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Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), pp. 158–9.

9 Peter Gregory, "Is Critical Buddhism Really Critical?" in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 293.

10 Abe Masao, *Zen and Western Thought* (Honolulu, 1985), p. 112.

recent years a number of scholars, including Dale Wright[11] and Victor Sōgen Hori,[12] have argued in different ways that the common "transcendent" reading does not give an accurate reflection of the realities of either the traditional understandings or of the current monastic practices of Zen. Thus the Critical Buddhism project can be understood as an attempt towards redressing a skewed imbalance in Zen towards things like experience, intuition, and interiority over language, reason, and practice. We might thus attribute some of the Critical Buddhist intransigence on these matters to rhetoric—to a feeling that, in order to truly reveal the middle path or simply in order to get their ideas heard, unconventional extremes must sometimes be posited without quarter. Sueki Fumihiko argues that the Critical Buddhist strategy "aimed at insuring that the issues they raised would not be ignored or get swept aside in the general current of minute scholarly problems."[13]

What is being presented in Critical Buddhism is at once simple and decidedly complex. Simple, because here truth does not seem to be based on any single foundation, whether historically or metaphysically located. As Griffith Foulk has adequately shown in his work on *The Ch'an School and its Place in the Buddhist Monastic Tradition*, there is in fact no doctrine, practice, genre or institution that can be called an essential, defining feature of Chan/Zen.[14] Rather, Critical Buddhism is based on a vision of what is deemed the best representation of Buddhism in terms of real-world effects and practical manifestations—that is, the phrase "true Buddhism" may be shorthand for the sort of Buddhism that, while based in the core teachings of Buddhist tradition, is also most suitable in terms of bringing about practical forms of "liberation" in contemporary society. Of course, a number of terms in this formula—not least the Critical Buddhist understanding of "liberation"—require further analysis. Along similar lines, when Hakamaya and Matsumoto make provocative claims such as "Zen is not Buddhism," we must carefully unpack both the possible motivations and implications involved before engaging in critique. What can such a statement mean? First, as noted above, we must say that it is highly rhetorical, and quite clearly presented in such a way as to call for response. Beyond this, what does "is not" imply here?

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11 Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*.

12 Victor Sōgen Hori, "Kōan and *Kenshō* in the Rinzai Zen Curriculum," in Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (eds), *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism* (New York, 2000).

13 Sueki Fumihiko, "A Reexamination of Critical Buddhism," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 322.

14 Foulk, however, undercuts his conclusion about Zen's historicity by suggesting that, while Zen as a tradition can be studied historically, enlightenment is "entirely beyond the scope of critical historiography" (T. Griffith Foulk, *The Ch'an School and Its Place in the Buddhist Monastic Tradition* [University of Michigan, 1987], p. 32).

On the most basic level, the claim that "Zen is not Buddhism" might be read in the following way: According to our own attempts to reformulate or reinterpret Buddhism along lines of critical rationality, ethical circumspection, and (liberal) political justice, the Japanese Zen tradition, as it has been expressed and lived, does not, in the main, fit within this new conceptual category of Buddhism. Or, in other words: We, rather because than in spite of being affiliated with the Sōtō Zen school, do not like what has happened to Mahāyāna (and particularly Chan/Zen) Buddhism over roughly the past thousand years, and hope that, by initiating dialogue (and counter-critique), we may be able to instigate a thoroughgoing reformation of Zen from within. Of note: the Buddhism that serves as the touchstone for Critical Buddhism is decidedly Mahāyāna Buddhism. Though their harshest critiques are directed in the main towards Japanese Buddhism—and Zen in particular—both Hakamaya and Matsumoto uphold a vision of Buddhism that is Mahāyānist, even if it is of a decidedly reformed sort. This way of thinking is reminiscent of the supersessionism that characterizes the history of the so-called Greater Vehicle since the earliest schisms in India. However, what distinguishes Critical Buddhism here is that, just as it avoids the originalist temptation, so does it refrain from suggesting that Buddhism has been a historical line of progression from relative ignorance to enlightenment in the flower of the Dharma tree that is Japanese Buddhism. More important is the spark of criticalism in the Mahāyāna stream, noted by Abe as follows: "In Mahayana Buddhism, criticism against the oneness of everything beyond differentiation as a false equality and the rejection of Nirvana as simply the transcendence of samsara are key points by which Mahayana Buddhism distinguishes itself from Theravāda Buddhism. These points have, however, often been overlooked by Western scholars."[15] At any rate, such a reading of the truth-claims underlying Critical Buddhism aligns it squarely with a "pragmatist" conception of truth, whereby "truth" is neither correspondence to reality nor coherence within a system but relates rather to effects of language upon its users. This connection will be explored further below. All of the above indicates that, in addition to its status as a type of hermeneutics, there is an inescapably heuristic element to the Critical Buddhist project.

Abe Masao, echoing a trope of D.T. Suzuki, says, "It is clear that Zen is not a philosophy. It is beyond words and intellect and is not, as in the case of philosophy, a study of the processes governing thought and conduct, nor a theory of principles or laws that regulate people and the universe."[16] Such runs counter to the Critical Buddhist interpretation, which insists that, in fact, Buddhism (with which Zen aligns itself) *is* a philosophy, if by philosophy is meant a practice of critical thinking and engagement with the world in a clear, thoughtful, discriminating fashion. For Hakamaya and Matsumoto, contemporary understandings—or rather, misunderstandings—of Zen encapsulate what has gone wrong with Buddhism. Indeed, Hakamaya and Matsumoto see in contemporary Sōtō Zen (their own

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15 Abe, *Zen and Western Thought*, pp. 178–9.

16 Ibid., p. 4.

sect) a serious misunderstanding of the teachings of the sect's founder, Dōgen (1200–1253), especially but not exclusively with respect to the question of Buddha-nature (*busshō*). Suzuki Daisetsu (Teitarō) (1870–1966), known to the West as D.T. Suzuki, made it his personal mission to spread Buddhism from Japan to the Western world, with substantial success. In recent times, however, his works—and in particular his characterization of Zen—have been criticized from a number of angles. According to Critical Buddhism, Suzuki, in bringing Zen to North America, spread the already rampant topical undercurrent to Buddhism in the West. Much of the problem lies in Suzuki's conflation of Zen and "Japanese culture." Hakamaya, in "Zen-shū hihan," argues that Suzuki, along with Yanagida Seizan and countless other apologists and commentators of the past century, has missed a critical distinction between these two things, a distinction based on the intrinsically *critical* nature of Buddhism, and the intrinsically *topical* nature of Japanese culture.[17] Suzuki has been criticized by others, for things as diverse as his distortion of Zen along the lines of Jamesian metaphysics, to his ideological support and Buddhist justification for the war effort.

We come now to an important point in the argument of Critical Buddhism, and one that sets the stage for the present study: the idea that there is *something wrong with especially Japanese, and even more particularly Zen Buddhism* is an assumption that appears to undergird the whole structure of the quest for a Critical Buddhism. Yet there are two problems with this: 1) the presumed *wrongs* of Buddhism—which seem to flip between accusations at the socio-ethical and buddhological-doctrinal levels—are not clearly or consistently spelled out in the work of Critical Buddhism; and 2) the emphasis in Critical Buddhism on reinterpreting and re-examining key texts in Buddhist tradition gives their work a highly philological tone, which in turn weakens—or, at any rate, does not adequately support—their strong statements regarding the ethical or political lapses of Japanese or Zen Buddhism. In short, the links between some of the main arguments of Critical Buddhism are tenuous at best. This is not to say that the arguments themselves fail on their own, but that they would be stronger if connected in a more direct and concise fashion.

Although clearly locating themselves within the Sōtō Zen tradition, and bolstered by the high position given to Sōtō sect founder Dōgen, the Critical Buddhists could also invoke Rinzai (Ch. Linji, ?–866) as a prophet of Critical Buddhism. After all, it is Rinzai's "Kill the Buddha! Kill the patriarchs!" that inspired his eponymous sect's early nonconformism—in theory if rarely in actual practice.

> If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill the Buddha.
> If you meet the patriarchs or the arhats on your way, kill them too …
> Bodhidharma was an old bearded barbarian …

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[17] Hakamaya Noriaki, "Zen-shū hihan," *Komazawa Daigaku Zenkenkyūjo nenpō*, 1 (1990): pp. 62–87.

> Nirvana and Bodhi are dead stumps to tie your donkey to.
> The sacred teachings are only lists of ghosts, sheets of paper fit for wiping the pus from your boils.[18]

"Rinzai threatened his followers with perpetual agony in life's 'birth-and-death-sea' if they continued to love the sacred and hate the secular," says Jon Carter Covell, while commenting on Rinzai's influence on the equally iconoclastic Japanese Rinzai monk Ikkyū (1394–1481).[19] Yet, at the same time, Covell adds, "Rinzai in the ninth century had made the Buddhist truth or 'Dharma' almost synonymous with the 'Way' of philosophical Taoism as expounded in the *Tao Te Ching*," and one contemporary Kyoto *rōshi* has claimed that, largely as a result of Rinzai, "ninth century Zen was 99 percent Taoism; only the vocabulary was slightly different." If true, this would of course eliminate Rinzai from the Critical Buddhism pantheon of heroes, and show that iconoclasm itself may be a necessary but not sufficient condition for Buddhist criticalism.

The above remarks lead us to the issue of harmony as an East Asian ideal, as well as the historical Buddhist notion that causing a schism in the sangha or Buddhist community is a great—perhaps the greatest—of all offenses. A few words need to be said about this. Let me begin by noting a recent short piece written by Eliot Cohen in 2002 for the *Middle Way* journal. Cohen is particularly concerned with the effects of an anti-intellectual tendency of modern Zen, especially in America. In response to an informal poll among self-professed Buddhist members of various on-line chat groups, which asked the question: "What is Dharma?" Cohen reports receiving the following five main replies: "It is about finding your oneness with all things;" "It cannot be articulated;" "It is about finding God;" "It's about reincarnation;" and "There are no rules to follow." These reflect, according to Cohen, a kind of "wooly Buddhism" that pervades American Buddhism today, in which ignorance seems to be viewed "as one of the signposts on the road to enlightenment instead of part of the heart of the problem."[20] Yet, for all this, Cohen's piece is muddled by what appears to be a serious contradiction: while lambasting those "pseudo-Buddhists" who dare to proclaim sectarian superiority to others, Cohen himself clearly believes in the need for a return to some sort of non-sectarian, ideal or original Buddhism. Which leads us back to the these large but important questions: What criteria serve to make such a distinction between true and false Buddhism? What exactly is Cohen bothered by? How could it be fixed? Part of the confusion here can be attributed to the modern (relativist) tendency to conflate anything exlusivist or sectarian with authoritarianism—which flies in the face of much evidence showing precisely the opposite, i.e., a strong connection

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18 Rin. 10.

19 Jon Carter Covell, *Ikkyu's Red Thread* (Seoul, 1981), p. 58.

20 Eliot Cohen, "The Quiet Crisis in Western Buddhism," *The Middle Way: Journal of the Buddhist Society*, 76/4 (2000): p. 235; see also Victor Sōgen Hori, "Sweet-and-Sour Buddhism," *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* (Fall 1994): pp. 48–52.

between the *non-sectarian* ideal of *harmony* or *unity* and authoritarianism. To his credit, Cohen notes this potential problem near the end of his piece; but he does not go out of his way to clarify or rectify the matter. In fact, one of his concluding tips for students of Buddhism is for them to verify the authority of a particular Buddhist organization by checking for the group's authentic lineage: "If the lineage is missing, you may well find that the Dhamma/Dharma is missing too."[21]

Besides issues of politicized Buddhism and the dynamics of power, also important to note at the outset is the aspect of Zen that seems to trouble Hakamaya more than anything else: the oft-noted Zen critique of reason and language. The Chan/Zen traditions have for many centuries suggested that the fundamental teachings are ultimately "beyond words and letters" and have correspondingly emphasized the direct transmission of Zen from master to student, in which the teacher's authority over the student is virtually absolute.[22] Hakamaya explicitly rejects the authoritarian idea that a teacher is absolute and never mistaken.[23] But it is really the former assumption—that Zen is anti-rational and apophatic—which faces the most trenchant criticism, and it is this aspect that will form the bulk of the present study.

Finally, more needs to be said about the character of "true Buddhism" being advocated by Critical Buddhism. Hakamaya provides the most striking and simple answer in his infamous declaration that "criticism alone is Buddhism."[24] But this of course begs the question: what is *criticism*? For Hakamaya, criticism seems to imply the ability to make distinctions, to be, in a literal sense, "discriminating." He argues that it is *only* critical thinking that can combat *real* discrimination (in the socio-political sense), which results largely from lack of logical/ethical discrimination—often in the name of some greater unity or harmony. But what is the content or ground of such a critical thinking? This is not always clear in the writings of Critical Buddhists, who have been criticized for not being very

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21 Cohen, "Quiet Crisis," p. 236.

22 See Stuart Lachs, "Coming Down from the Zen Clouds: A Critique of the Current State of American Zen" (Online, 1994). Available at: www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/ComingDownfromtheZenClouds.htm [accessed November 14, 2010], for a critique of the authoritarian element within American Zen, a problem which Lachs sees as the root of the many Zen scandals of the 1980s and 1990s.

23 Of course, as Victor Hori has rightly noted, even this seemingly simple idea of authority within the Zen monastery is complicated by our own modern Western notions of freedom as simply "freedom from constraint" (Victor Hori, "Liberal Education and the Teaching of Buddhism," in Victor Sōgen Hori, Richard P. Hayes and J. Mark Shields [eds], *Teaching Buddhism in the West: From the Wheel to the Web* [London and New York, 2002]).

24 Hakamaya later extrapolated upon this slightly, by saying that "By 'Critical Buddhism' I mean to indicate that 'Buddhism is criticism' or that 'only that which is critical is Buddhism'" (Hakamaya Noriaki, "Critical Philosophy versus Topical Philosophy," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson [eds], *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* [Honolulu, 1997], p. 56).

forthright on the substance of criticism (or criticalism), while being all too clear—to the point, Jamie Hubbard claims, of obsession—with regard to what it is *not* (i.e., topicalism). I will limit myself to a brief introduction of the terms here, to be followed in later chapters by a more detailed exposition of both criticalism and topicalism, utilizing of the work of Critical Buddhism, the comments and reactions of their critics, and my own attempts to extend the concept into the realm of comparative philosophy and ethics.

Topicalism, sometimes referred to by Matsumoto using the Sanskrit neologism *dhātu-vāda*—meaning something like the "way of locus"; or more simply, "essentialism"—stands as the *bête noire* of Critical Buddhism. Defined by Matsumoto as "a substantialist monism in which the Buddha-nature is the sole foundational reality out of which apparent reality is produced,"[25] and by Jamie Hubbard as "an aesthetic mysticism unconcerned with critical differentiation between truth and falsity and not in need of rational demonstration,"[26] topicalism is a way of thinking about Buddhism, scholarship, religion, and, one might add, life more generally, based on the notion of "a singular, real locus (*dhātu*) that gives rise to a plurality of phenomena … a 'generative monism' or a 'transcendental realism'."[27] Moreover, according to Hakamaya, it is in fact a longstanding Buddhist heresy, dating back at least to the Indian Abhidharma, and one that has dominated and continues to dominate the Mahāyāna tradition as a whole, and its Japanese offshoots in particular, bolstered not only by Shinto and Daoist incursions but also in more recent times by the emergence of "postmodern" thought.[28]

Another way to understand the project of Critical Buddhism is to see it as an attempt to transform or "correct" the Zen Buddhist notion of enlightenment or awakening, by fusing it with enlightenment or liberation in the rational, ethical, and political—or one might say, modern Western—sense. Of course, the notion of fusing or Westernizing Buddhism raises a whole host of concerns, not least of which is the taint of several centuries of orientalism and reverse orientalism—or, in Judith Snodgrass's terms, "occidentalism."[29] As Wright notes, in the standard modern Western understanding, enlightenment or emancipation is understood as the:

> progressive attainment of power and maturity [based on] self-possession [and a] consciousness in command of its processes, freeing itself from the repressive

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[25] Matsumoto Shirō, "The Doctrine of *Tathāgata-garbha* Is Not Buddhist," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 171.

[26] Jamie L. Hubbard, "Introduction," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), p. vii.

[27] Matsumoto, "The Doctrine of *Tathāgata-garbha*," p. 171.

[28] Hakamaya, "Critical Philosophy," p. 56.

[29] Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition* (Chapel Hill, 2004); also see Hori, "Sweet and Sour Buddhism."

> forces of authoritative power and the prejudices of immature conceptualization [while] Zen freedom, by contrast, evokes images of relinquishing autonomy and the will to power in their various forms—the will to explain, the will to certain knowledge, the will to control, the will to security, and so on.[30]

While Wright's point is well-taken, we must be careful not to fall into easy characterizations of "Zen" or "the West," of the kind we see in the work of D.T. Suzuki and, to a lesser degree, the Kyoto School. The Romantic stream of Western culture, in particular, complicates any easy dichotomy: the Romantics were just as concerned to banish ratiocination and Cartesian certainty as they were to develop a Promethean hero; while Zen, as with all forms of Buddhism, certainly aims to combat "immature conceptualization" (though not necessarily by enhancing conceptualization). At any rate, it is not simply a matter of replacing one form of "enlightenment" with another, but by selectively appropriating aspects that appear most "effective" towards producing (Buddhist) goals. Criticalism, the necessary response to the topicalist heresy, is understood by Critical Buddhism not as Cartesian rationalism or Western Enlightenment humanism in Buddhist guise, but is ostensibly founded on certain inviolable Buddhist doctrines or principles, against which everything else—even other doctrines and forms of belief held sacrosanct in some Buddhist quarters—must be judged. Thus, beyond rationalism, criticalism is to some degree founded on (Buddhist) *faith*, where faith does not imply the unity of the object of belief and believer but rather believing in—i.e., holding true and abiding by—certain key doctrines such as *pratītya-samutpāda*, while using one's intellect and language to judge and elaborate the meaning and practical application of these principles in contemporary society.

In some important respects, the methodological criterion employed by the Critical Buddhists is the same as that presented by Roger Corless in his 1990 essay entitled "How is the Study of Buddhism Possible?" Corless suggests that, first, Buddhism cannot be adequately studied, taught, or understood using the "objective" framework of modern academia; and, second, the proper approach to Buddhism must involve an employment of the common ground of all Buddhist sects and movements—Śākyamuni Buddha as "the most recent re-discoverer of *pratītya-samutpāda*"[31] and the "primary manifestation of *śūnyatā*." Taking this matrix as a basis, "we could then select significant incidents in the transmission of the Dharma (that is, in 'Buddhism'), expand them synchronically and diachronically, and subject them to any kind of critical analysis that does not destroy our declared Buddhist axia."[32]

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30 Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, p. 136.

31 See Matsumoto, "The Doctrine of *Tathāgata-garbha*," p. 165.

32 Roger Corless, "How is the Study of Buddhism Possible?" *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 2/1 (1990): p. 38.

Elsewhere, Hakamaya is more explicit in his answer to the question of what constitutes *true* or *critical* Buddhism. It consists, he suggests, of three defining elements:

1. The law of causation or *pratītya-samutpāda*, which implies the emptiness of all phenomena; thus anything that implies an underlying substance (a *topos* or *locus*) is *dhātu-vāda*.
2. The moral imperative to act selflessly to benefit others (*mahākarunā*); thus doctrines such as *hongaku*, which assert that all things are "originally enlightened" or "included in the substance of the Buddha" must be rejected.
3. The use of "faith, words, and the use of the intellect (*prajñā*) to *choose* the truth of *pratītya-samutpāda*"; thus doctrines of promoting apophatia (i.e., *zetsugon*) are denied, and the practice of discriminating wisdom (*dharma-pravicaya*) upheld.[33]

The first of these three levels might be called the *doctrinal-substantive cover*, the second the *evaluative-ethical core*, and the third the *pragmatic-critical foundation*. Each level has its topical antithesis or shadow, the conventional understanding that must be replaced.[34] Stated simply, the first level, faith or adherence to the doctrine of *pratītya-samutpāda*, counters the notion of *hongaku* or original enlightenment as well as related understandings of Buddha-nature/*tathāgata-garbha*. The second, "moral-ethical" level, centered on *mahākaruṇā* (Jp. *daihi*) or "great compassion," opposes the (non-)ethic of *satori*, understood as a kind of "pure contemplation." Finally, level three, which provides the "means"—in this case *dharma-pravicaya* (Jp. *chakuhō*) or discriminating knowledge[35]—is for Critical Buddhism the antithesis to the apophatic tradition signified in Japanese by *zetsugon*—i.e., the denial of words.

In order to get at the heart of the matter, the proper question to ask is not what Buddhism *is*, but rather what Buddhism *does*—or perhaps, what it *is for*.

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33 Hakayama Noriaki, *Hongaku shisō hihan* (Tokyo, 1989), p. 21; adapted in Paul L. Swanson, "Why They Say Zen Is Not Buddhism: Recent Japanese Critiques of Buddha-Nature," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), pp. 13–14; also see Sueki, "A Reexamination," pp. 324–5.

34 Paul Swanson suggests three levels at which the Critical Buddhist critique of Zen works: *buddhological*, *sectarian*, and *social criticism* (Swanson, "Why They Say"). Sueki Fumihiko adds a fourth level—the philosophical—to these three (Sueki, "A Reexamination"). This study is primarily concerned with the third and fourth (i.e., social criticism and philosophy), though the first (i.e., buddhological) also needs to be addressed, given the impossibility of doing Buddhist philosophy without some measure of buddhology.

35 *Dharma-pravicaya* is glossed by the *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism* as "investigation of the teaching"; "analysis of the teachings using correct (discriminating) function"; "to analyse a matter" (DDB).

Hakamaya, in his attack on so-called topical thinking, criticizes the notion that *satori* or awakening is the goal of Buddhism; rather, he asserts, the goal is *dharma-pravicaya*—"the clear discrimination of phenomena."[36]But this is not really the "end" or *telos* of Critical Buddhism, it is rather its mode or method; in short, it is "criticism" itself. As we have seen, criticism—in terms of discriminating knowledge—is the ground of the proper Buddhist sphere. It is also, for Hakamaya the "minimum requirement" for *any* religion.[37] The *goal* of Critical Buddhism is rather what centers the sphere: "the realization of 'wisdom' (*bodhi*) for the practice of 'great compassion' (*mahakaruna*)."[38] Here we shift from a primarily ontological or "objective" inquiry to a more explicitly constructive, ethical, soteriological, and perhaps even "theological" one.

In this study, I will treat Critical Buddhism as a contemporary case of what in Mahāyāna Buddhism is called *upāya-kausālya* (Jp. *hōben*)—i.e., "expedient" or "skillful means."[39] In other words, as an heuristic or form of medicine—itself conditioned by circumstances—directed at curing a particular illness affecting modern Buddhism and circumventing a more fully developed Buddhist socio-ethical praxis in the contemporary world. The inspiration and fundamental insights of Critical Buddhism are extremely valuable for twenty-first-century scholarship in Buddhist studies and Japanese thought, and, more specifically, may serve as a philosophical complement or support to recent trends such as Engaged Buddhism and so-called Buddhist theology.[40] In particular, as Jacqueline Stone notes, the *ideological* component of Critical Buddhism is a valuable contribution, in the double sense of working to uncover and clarify the ideological effects of Buddhist doctrine in the "real world," while presenting its own critical work as unabashedly normative and ideological.[41] Much more needs to be said, however, about the

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36 Hakamaya, "Critical Philosophy," p. 74.

37 Hakamaya Noriaki, "Scholarship as Criticism," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 133.

38 Yamaguchi Zuiho, quoted in Hubbard, "Introduction," p. xvi.

39 "The wisdom of being able to save sentient beings by knowing discriminated phenomena. A temporary teaching established in order to lead sentient beings to the true teaching" (DDB). There has been much scholarly discussion on the precise implications of *upāya-kausālya,* particularly with regard to its application to ethics. See, e.g., Gene Reeves, "Appropriate Means as the Ethics of the Lotus Sutra," in Gene Reeves (ed.), *A Buddhist Kaleidoscope: Essays on the Lotus Sutra* (Tokyo, 2002), pp. 379–92; Damien Keown, "Paternalism in the Lotus Sutra," in Gene Reeves (ed.), *A Buddhist Kaleidoscope: Essays on the Lotus Sutra* (Tokyo, 2002), pp. 367–78.

40 Since the 1990s, Matsumoto has taken on the task of uncovering what it means to do "critical theology [in Buddhism]" (*hihan shūgaku*) within the context of Dōgen studies; see Steven Heine, "Review Article: After the Storm—Matsumoto Shirō's Transition from 'Critical Buddhism' to 'Critical Theology'," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 28/1–2 (2001): pp. 133–46.

41 See Stone, "Some Reflections," p. 182.

meaning—that is to say, the implications in the broadest sense—of this "new methodological movement." Though this label—employed as part of the title of the American Academy of Religion's 1994 panel—might appear restrictive, it is nonetheless apt in alluding to the hermeneutical element of Critical Buddhism, and it fits with one prominent Japanese scholar's reading of the spirit of Critical Buddhism as a broad "perspective from which to reflect on life and culture."[42]

Rather than examine Critical Buddhism in terms of a highly specific (textual or philological) debate about the meaning of certain Buddhist doctrines, I would like to expand the discussion outwards—into the history of modern Japanese intellectual traditions as well as those of the contemporary West—and to shift focus away from a disclosure of the truth of Zen or Buddhism towards an interpretation of meaning, defined largely in terms of Buddhist ethics and the application of Buddhist teachings to social activism. Despite the importance of establishing an epistemological distinction between topicalism and criticalism, the primary goal of Critical Buddhism is, I argue, ethical or even political—rooted in a particularly modern, liberal, humanist understanding of Buddhism, which borrows from but is not reliant upon Western philosophical premises and concerns. As such, Critical Buddhism cannot be defined on the basis of shared community, a specific historical tradition, or even a set of ritual practices, but rather finds its foundation in the Mahāyāna dialectic of wisdom and compassion.

In his discussion of the roots of criticalism, Hakamaya invokes the Cartesian tradition in Western thinking, opposing such to the Western topicalist tradition initiated with Giambattista Vico's (1668–1744) critique of René Descartes (1596–1650), but extending all the way down to twentieth-century phenomenology and the hybrid philosophy of the Kyoto School. Aside from the many implications of positing a "Buddhist Descartes," the Critical Buddhist appeal to one of the foundational (and lately much maligned) philosophers of the modern West in order to support a thesis of the meaning of true Buddhism raises a number of important questions for philosophy of religion, as well as for comparative ethics and hermeneutics. Particularly significant is the assumption that criticalism can provide a solid and sure foundation for Buddhist ethics in particular and religious ethics in general. This study explores this presumably intercultural category vis-à-vis the work of the Kyoto School, which acts as an important foil for Critical Buddhists, Western philosophical hermeneutics, especially the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), and finally the recent movement towards both Engaged Buddhism and "Buddhist theology." While accepting many of the basic insights of Critical Buddhism, I argue that the polarity of logic/*critica*/reason (i.e., "Descartes") versus intuition/*topos*/myth ("Vico") is no longer sustainable—if, indeed, it ever was. I argue that the twentieth-century backlash against Descartes indicates *not* a return to premodern thinking but rather an awareness of the *limits* of Cartesian rationality—based, in large part, on an appreciation of language as a historically mediated and "world-building" phenomenon, elements which resonate

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[42] Sueki, "A Reexamination," p. 334.

through Buddhist tradition and in the work of the Critical Buddhists themselves. Moreover, in order to hold on to the twin poles of reason and compassion, I argue that the Critical Buddhists would do better to employ an alternative vision of rationality to that of Descartes. This alternative paradigm has roots in both Western and Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions.

As already noted, the work of the Kyoto School plays an important role as philosophical foil for Critical Buddhism. As Steven Heine has noted, Critical Buddhism has presented the first systematic challenge to this inceptional and still powerful movement in Japanese thought.[43] In the confrontation of Critical Buddhism, a late twentieth-century movement of Zen scholars who employ both Asian Buddhism and Western philosophy for purposes of religious and social reform, and the Kyoto School, an early to mid-twentieth-century movement of Japanese philosophers who utilized Buddhism and Western thought in order to elaborate a properly indigenous but ostensibly universal philosophy, many broader issues about the relation of religion and philosophy, religion and ethics, and the nature of Buddhism and Zen, are raised, particularly with respect to Buddhist language, ethics, epistemology, and the debate over the notion of "pure experience" or "pure consciousness." Indeed, the latter point is, even more than *tathāgata-garbha* or *hongaku shisō*, the most problematic idea to be found in modern interpretations of Buddhism, and Zen in particular.[44]

In short, the goal of this study is to provoke a second wave of Critical Buddhism, by emphasizing in particular the epistemological and ethical components of criticalism, in order to "more fully release the transformative energies of [Buddhist] tradition and of scholarly questioning of tradition."[45] It is an attempt by a scholar of Asian and comparative thought to critically reformulate and resituate Critical Buddhism in a new, mature stage, to recoup some of the rivulets before they return to the sea, and finally, to extend the streams of this new methodological movement into the broader seas of Buddhist ethics and of critical scholarship in the humanities.

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43 Steven Heine, "Critical Buddhism and Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*: The Debate over the 75-Fascicle and 12-Fascicle Texts," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 280. Of course, one might cite the early criticism of Nishida by Tosaka Jun (1900–1945), but Tosaka's critique emerges from a very different, explicitly Marxist and materialist perspective.

44 I am indebted to Victor Hori for this idea, in particular his assertion that, in contrast to *samādhi*, "pure consciousness" is "a political concept which wants to affirm the original purity of the individual against the demeaning influence of society" (Victor Hori, "Kōan and *Kenshō*," p. 309).

45 Joseph S. O'Leary, "The Hermeneutics of Critical Buddhism," *Eastern Buddhist, New Series*, 31/2 (1998): p. 279.

Chapter 1
Buddhism, Criticism, and Postwar Japan

> Nobody foresaw in 1946 what now appears as an inherent disposition to continue the myth of prewar Japanese order … the reification of this model of social relationships that was fundamentally legitimated by the machinery of emperorism. While it is undeniable that this interlocking network of relationships has resulted in guaranteeing minimal security and welfare for every Japanese by incorporating all into a national program, it has also severely inhibited the spirit of criticism and opposition within all areas of Japanese society. This effort to make the Japanese appear as members of the vast "middle stratum" has been reinforced immeasurably by an ideology of cultural exceptionalism that has sought to construct a national subjectivity devoid of class and gender divisions (*Nihon-jinron*).[1]

> On receiving an initiation from his guru, Rudra took the idea of nonduality as license to act out his dark side. Since there is no absolute good or evil and all social codes originate in the conceptual mind, he felt that he could do anything he wanted. He ran brothels and criminal gangs, and taught yoga to his henchmen to make them more efficient murderers. When a fellow disciple told him he was perverting the dharma, Rudra asked his guru which of them was right. The guru told Rudra that he was wrong. Enraged, he drew his sword and killed his teacher on the spot. This act propelled him into hell. He was not put there as a punishment, his own state of mind put him there. And he never gets out.[2]

Taken together, the above quotes provide the basis for the two-sided project of Critical Buddhism. The first, taken from an analysis of contemporary Japanese political culture, makes the point that postwar Japan has only tentatively, and, the authors are by no means the first to claim, insufficiently come to terms with its recent past and some of the deeper problems surrounding the construction of Japanese "modernity" and "subjectivity." This point is extrapolated upon at some length and with great nuance by John Dower in his work on postwar Japanese culture and the "legacy of censored democracy" brought about by collusion between postwar Japanese leaders and American occupation authorities.[3] As Dower puts it:

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1 Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian, "Japan in the World," *Boundary 2*, 18/3 (1991): pp. 2–3.

2 Stephen Butterfield, "Accusing the Tiger: Sexual Ethics and Buddhist Teachers," *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, 1/4 (1992): pp. 46–51.

3 John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York, 1999), p. 439. See also Herbert Bix's monograph on *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York, 2001)—like Dower's, a Pulitzer Prize winning book.

> [O]ne legacy of the revolution from above was a continued socialization in the acceptance of authority—reinforcement of a collective fatalism *vis-à-vis* political and social power and a sense that ordinary people were unable to influence the course of events. For all their talk of democracy, the conquerors worked hard to engineer consensus; and on many central issues, they made clear that the better part of political wisdom was silence and conformism. *So well did they succeed in reinforcing this consciousness that after they left, and time passed, many non-Japanese including Americans came to regard such attitudes as peculiarly Japanese*.[4]

Several important points are raised in this passage. First, Dower points to the substantial power exercised by the SCAP authorities in reshaping postwar Japanese political culture, especially regarding the curbing of free expression with regard to criticism of political or social authority. Though the initial impulse in the Americans' hugely idealistic vision for reshaping modern Japan was deeply (perhaps naïvely) liberal, a scant three years after the war's end this was to change considerably, for reasons both external and internal. This change has become known as the "reverse course," and is said to have begun with National Security Council (NSC) document 1412 in October 1948, or alternatively with the quashed general strike of February 1947. In any event, by 1948 the Occupation had "retracted its original plans to demilitarize, democratize, and perforce weaken Japan through punitive indemnities. Japan was now a key ally in the crusade against Peking and Moscow … Americans regretted their earlier reformist zeal, especially after the Korean War broke out in June 1950."[5] Second, and perhaps more important for our purposes, is the recognition of a "re-creation" or perhaps the winnowing of a cultural mythology: namely, the widespread notion among Japanese as well as foreigners that criticism is itself foreign and un-Japanese. While it is certainly true that prewar, especially immediate prewar Japan was a culture where free expression and dissent were discouraged, it is equally true that, whether it be the Kamakura-period (1185–1333) Buddhist reappropriation of various forms of Chinese Buddhism, the adoption of Neo-Confucianism in the Edo period (1603–1868), or the revolutionary character of the Meiji Restoration (1868) itself, criticism of the status quo has often been the vehicle for change and transformation in Japan. One might even say that criticism, along with—usually combined with—the appropriation and transformation of foreign ideas, is a defining motif of both modern and traditional Japanese culture.

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[4] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, p. 439, my emphasis.

[5] Bob T. Wakabayashi, "Introduction," in Bob T. Wakabayashi (ed.), *Modern Japanese Thought* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 23; see also Najita Tetsuo and H.D. Harootunian, "Japan's Revolt Against the West," in Bob T. Wakabayashi (ed.), *Modern Japanese Thought* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 266–7.

The second quote cited above is, at first glance, quite different from the first. Rather than a critical appraisal of recent political history, here we have an anecdotal story from within the canon of Buddhist teachings designed presumably to present a truth of some sort about Buddhist ethics. And indeed, here the meaning of the passage is much less straightforward. It would seem that the tale of Rudra's behavior and eventual damnation is meant to be a warning of sorts, against a particular, simplistic reading of non-duality. In this regard, however, two points merit our attention: 1) while this appears to be an admonition against license in the most general sense; namely, against the erroneous view that, since all is relative or non-dual, then there is no proper way of acting; 2) at a more specific level, the nature of Rudra's acts—all of them couched in violence—suggest that what is particularly key to this story is Rudra's breaking of the Bodhisattva vow of compassion. Moreover, this brief parable could be read as suggesting that there is a link between the misreading of non-duality and the temptation to act in a greedy and murderous fashion. Investigation of this basic connection—at the most general level, between enlightenment or awakening and "practice"—is one of the key components of Critical Buddhism.

It is a regrettable but irrefutable fact that the historical connection between religion, violence, and warfare provides enough material for a series of heavy volumes.[6] Whether it be ancient Israelites slaughtering the children of Canaan in Yahweh's name, medieval Christian crusaders waging righteous battle against the infidel, or Osama bin Laden plotting *jihad* against the West, religion and warfare appear inextricably interlinked. For every Gandhi, Mother Teresa, or Dalai Lama, there seem to be dozens of generally less familiar but formidable figures ready and willing to stoke the flames of conflict with the torch of religious truth. And despite those such as Abe Masao[7] and Philip Kapleau who wish to make Buddhism the sole exception to this sad litany, Buddhism also merits a chapter in this wider story. Ironically, despite his assertion that Zen is free from any form of "holy war," Kapleau in the same book falls into the type of antinomian justification for violence that was the favorite tool of wartime Zen militarists: "Yet the right to life is not absolute, and individual life may unavoidably have to be sacrificed to preserve the health and welfare of society … If the act [of killing] were done no-mindedly, beyond *self-conscious* awareness of one taking life and a life being taken, no painful karma would be incurred, for in the profoundest sense there would be no killer and nothing killed."[8] Although Kapleau "hasten[s] to add that only a highly developed individual could act in this way," this type of rhetoric is hardly less justifiable than the wartime remark

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6 See Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, 1969), p. 44, for discussion of the link between religion and violence; also Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2001).

7 Masao Abe, *Zen and Comparative Studies* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 18.

8 Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen* (Garden City, 1980), pp. 246–7.

by one Zen master that "the precept throws the bomb."[9] For prominent American Zen teacher Robert Aitken, such Buddhist infelicities hardly began and ended with the modern Japanese Empire: "Buddhist teaching places responsibility upon human beings for maintaining harmony and enhancing maturity, but rulers who have professed the Buddha's Way have neglected their vows and played political games. Governments in South and Southeast Asia to this day can include the five main Buddhist precepts in their respective constitutions, yet violate them outrageously."[10]

The issue of violence within Buddhist tradition has only recently emerged as an object of concern among certain scholars; even still it remains a taboo subject in some quarters. Anthropologist Marvin Harris has noted the strange irony of the emergence of "religions of love and mercy": none of these so-called "nonkilling religions"—by which he means Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism—"has had any influence on the incidence or ferocity of war and each is implicated in devastating inversions of the principle of nonviolence and reverence for life."[11] Harris attributes this to the fact that whatever the sincerity of their personal convictions, as heads of state, those involved with spreading the religion were primarily concerned with maintaining stability within their realms and defeating external enemies. The Roman Emperor Constantine ("the Great," 273–337 CE) is a prime example, but even the lately lionized Indian Buddhist Emperor Aśoka ("the Great," 299–237 BCE) falls into this category. Ironically, the so-called nonkilling religions' emphasis on compassion may have persuaded enemies to let themselves be captured, thus facilitating political expansionism. In terms of Buddhism, Harris notes that, after an early period of "peaceful missionization," Buddhism became intimately involved in state formation in South and Southeast Asia—from the early Sri Lankan kings such as Parakrama Bahu who drove the Hindus from Tamil Nadu and attempted to conquer south India and Burma, through the Khmer Buddhist leaders who attacked Cambodia and Vietnam in the tenth century, the Thai Buddhist rulers who tried to control the Malay Peninsula, to the expansionist policies of both Tibetan lamas and their eventual conquerors and new converts, the Khans of Mongolia, rulers of perhaps the largest empire in world history.[12] In addition, India and China, and West Asia have witnessed the birth and decline of sundry Buddhist empires—indeed, as often as not the religion's fortunes were determined by the waxing and waning of the power of Buddhist kings.

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9 Kapleau, *Three Pillars*, p. 263. See Brian Victoria, "Engaged Buddhism: A Skeleton in the Closet?" (unpublished manuscript, 2001), p. 16; Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 267; Paul Demiéville, "Le Bouddhisme et la guerre," *Melanges*, 1 (1957): pp. 347, 352–3.

10 Quoted in Arnold Kotler (ed.), *Engaged Buddhist Reader: Ten Years of Engaged Buddhist Publishing* (Berkeley, 1996), p. 95.

11 Marvin Harris, *Our Kind* (New York, 1989), p. 448.

12 Ibid., p. 450.

Within recent Buddhist studies, in a normative vein, James Stroble argues that all violence—whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist—must be criticized from the dual standpoint of causality and *ahiṃsā* (Jp. *fugai*).[13] Stroble's paper begins with an assumption that is dubious, though common: i.e., that Buddhists are *more shocked*—and justifiably so—to learn of violence and warfare in Buddhist tradition than are followers of other religious traditions. This "fact"—which is both highly anecdotal and frankly insulting to other religions—provides the very basis for Stroble's inquiry into, as he puts it, "why they [i.e., Buddhist justifications for war] should not have arisen."[14] If it is indeed the case that self-confessed Buddhists, or at least those of the Western sort, find Buddhist war so jarring, my suspicion is that it can be attributed to a combination of two things: 1) idealistic and naïve ideas of Buddhism, and 2) lack of familiarity with Buddhist history. More recently, in response to the events of September 11, 2001, Bernard Faure has published a short but illuminating piece entitled "Buddhism and Violence," in which he suggests, citing many of the same cases as Harris, that even though traditional Buddhism had no concept of "holy war," it did "at times legitimize the recourse to violence and the just war."[15] Despite the clear prohibitions against killing to be found in, for example, the *Dhammapada* (Jp. *Hokkukyō*)[16] and *Brahma Net Sutra* (Sk. *Brahmajāla-sūtra*; Jp. *Bonmōkyō*),[17] factors such as ethnic and political identity, clerical and state power, and various interpretations of doctrines regarding "spontaneous action," "emptiness," and even compassion itself contributed to cases of Buddhist violence and warfare. Moreover, as Demiéville has noted, as early as the Mahāyāna *vinaya* (Jp. *kairitsu*) masters an argument for killing was being produced, to the effect that, "[i]f sentient beings do not exist, then there is no offense in killing … There is no offense in killing a heap of five aggregates, for it is like killing an

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13 James Stroble, "A Study of the Status of Violence in Early Buddhism." (Online, 1991). Available at: www2.hawaii.edu/~stroble/BUDDWAR.HTM [accessed November 14, 2010].

14 Ibid., p. 1.

15 Bernard Faure, "Buddhism and Violence," *Correspondence: An International Review of Culture and Society*, 9 (2002): p. 1.

16 "All fear death. Comparing others with oneself, one should neither kill nor cause to kill" (Dhp. 129).

17 "1. First Major Precept (On Killing): A disciple of the Buddha shall not himself kill, encourage others to kill, kill by expedient means, praise killing, rejoice at witnessing killing, or kill through incantation or deviant mantras. He must not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of killing, and shall not intentionally kill any living creature. As a Buddha's disciple, he ought to nurture a mind of compassion and filial piety, always devising expedient means to rescue and protect all beings. If instead, he fails to restrain himself and kills sentient beings without mercy, he commits a Parajika (major) offense" (BNS 4.1).

illusory dream or an image reflected in the mirror."[18] Demiéville goes on to note the irony in the fact that "Hinayana Buddhism views life as full of iniquity, yet maintains a strict prohibition against taking life. In contrast, Mahayana Buddhism claims to revere life, yet allows room in its logic to excuse or even glorify the taking of life."[19] I contend that the "irony" here is overstated, since, historically speaking, "Hinayana" (or Theravāda) Buddhist societies have not been so free from violence, warfare, or social oppression as the above seems to suggest. Paul Fleischman argues that, while Buddhism is "nonviolent," it is not "pacifist," based on what the Buddha actually taught. While the author rightly notes that, in the time and place of the historical Buddha, there was no clear conception of "pacifism" or of any sort of "organized, systematic theorizing about the human collective," his own argument betrays vestiges of a projection of modern, individualistic, thinking onto the Buddha (e.g., his goal was "to release its practitioners from authorities and ideologies").[20] The deeper problem, however, is the attempt to confine and clarify an originary, non-violent but non-pacifist Buddhism. Bernard Faure makes the much weaker claim that, relatively speaking, Buddhism has been on the whole less prone to warfare and violence than other major world religions—or, one assumes, the Abrahamic ones.[21] Even this, however, must be further problematized by extending our definition of violence beyond the obvious cases of war, and including things like revolt or revolution, domestic violence, sectarian violence, and passivity in cases of injustice. Thus, to raise the issue of whether Buddhism is either non-violent or "pacifist" is something of a misleading inquiry, since there seems to be little doubt that Buddhism *has at times been* violent, and perhaps even "pro-war" at both the individual and the institutional level. When the question is raised, however, it more often is meant to ask whether "inherently" Buddhism is non-violent, which, as I shall argue, is ultimately a fruitless, and perhaps even "non-Buddhist" type of inquiry.

In a provocative article entitled "The Nonduality of Good and Evil: Buddhist Reflections on the New Holy War," David Loy attempts to distinguish the conception of evil in Buddhism from that held in the "Abrahamic religions" based upon a purely doctrinal, modern, and idealized understanding of Buddhism (e.g., "Karma implies that when our actions are motivated by these roots of evil, their negative consequences tend to rebound back upon us"—a statement which glosses over the inconvenient fact that, in Buddhist tradition, karma was understood to work across one's successive lives, thus giving the notion a decidedly less modern spin, more akin perhaps to the idea of original sin than "what goes around, comes around"), combined with a heavily historicized

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18 Demiéville, "Le Bouddhisme," p. 353; from the *Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* (Sk. *Mahāprajñāparamitā-śāstra*; Ch. *Ta chih tu lun*; Jp. *Daichidoron* [T 25.164a19–23]).

19 Ibid.

20 Paul Fleischman, *The Buddha Taught Nonviolence, Not Pacificism* (Seattle, 2002).

21 Faure, "Buddhism and Violence," p. 2.

understanding of the Abrahamic traditions (e.g., using the policies of the US administration under George W. Bush as a spokesperson for such). Moreover, Loy's expression of sadness for the fact that bin Laden et al. may well soon reap their own karmic rewards is condescending at best, another version of the just wrath of God at worst.[22] What Buddhism *can* provide, as Loy notes, is an emphasis on understanding the conditions that underlie all events.

In the two decades since the birth of Critical Buddhism, the issue of specifically Buddhist involvement—or collaboration, to use a more loaded term—in twentieth century Japanese nationalism, militarism, and Imperial Way "fascism" has been raised in the West by a number of books, including the compilation *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (1994), Brian Victoria's *Zen at War* (1997) and *Zen War Stories* (2003), and, most recently, Christopher Ives's *Imperial-Way Zen: Ichikawa Hakugen's Critique and Lingering Questions for Buddhist Ethics* (2009). Another, more popular (and controversial) work, Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (1997), tells the grim story of the carnage levied upon the Chinese city of Nanking (now Nanjing) by Imperial Japanese troops over a several month period in 1937.[23] Though Chang speaks very little about the role of Buddhism, she asks some searching questions about the incident, which has been, until recently, virtually forgotten by the world—though not by China or Japan's Asian neighbors. "What broke down on the scene," she asks, "to allow the behaviour of Japanese soldiers to escape so totally the restraints that govern most human conduct?" and "Why did the Japanese officers permit and even encourage such a breakdown?"[24] More to the point of Critical Buddhism, Brian Victoria, in *Zen at War*, asks what was specifically "Buddhist" about prewar and wartime militarism in Japan, including not only the actions and beliefs of soldiers but also—perhaps more important—intellectual and political justifications for these actions and beliefs. It would seem that the attempt to justify and support the Japanese war effort in Buddhist terms was a fairly common occurrence, not simply the work of a few zealots and hard-liners. A number of high-ranking Buddhists, as well as most prominent intellectuals of the day were, at one time or another, quite ready to express their support of the war in terms that were often explicitly religious. In a now infamous and widely cited passage, D.T. Suzuki corroborates Victoria's point succinctly:

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[22] David Loy, "The Nonduality of Good and Evil: Buddhist Reflections on the New Holy War," *The Traansnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research* (2002). Available online at: ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-MISC/101797.htm [accessed November 14, 2010], p. 5.

[23] Also see the recent documentary film by Matsui Minoru, *Japanese Devils: Confessions of Imperial Army Soldiers from Japan's War Against China* (Jp. *Nihon kishi: Chū-nichi jūgonen sensō-moto nōgun heishi no kokuhaku*).

[24] Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (London, 1997), p. 19.

> Zen has sustained [the military classes] in two ways, morally and philosophically. Morally, because Zen is a religion which teaches us not to look backward once the course is decided upon; philosophically, because it treats life and death indifferently … The military mind, being—and this is one of the essential qualities of the fighter—comparatively simple and not at all addicted to philosophizing finds a congenial spirit in Zen.[25]

Remarks like this, coming not just from intellectuals with Buddhist leanings but also—more problematically, from a Buddhist perspective—from high-ranking Buddhist leaders themselves, have recently prompted much reflection in Japanese scholarly and Buddhist circles.[26] Indeed, at the most basic level, criticism of the wartime complicity of major twentieth-century Japanese religious leaders and philosophical figures has become a commonplace.[27] As the story goes, we are faced with the brute fact of a regime—manipulated by a cadre of hypocritical and power-hungry militarists—which, since the late Meiji period, had become increasingly authoritarian, ready and willing to eliminate resistance to imperial policy in whatever form such might take. In this version of the tale, the issue of individual responsibility is complicated (if not overridden) by the power and authority of the Japanese state to squelch all glimmers of resistance.[28] But all of this begs an important question: were those—and they were many—who not only abided but actively promoted and supported the war effort acting out of fear or out of a genuine commitment to the growing nationalistic fervor? To a certain extent, we can indeed attribute the complicity of these figures to a simple matter of survival, not only in terms of their careers, but increasingly, as the Pacific War began, in terms of their lives. But this hardly seems sufficient by itself. At a slightly deeper level, we might note the phenomenon that Hannah Arendt

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[25] D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton, 1970), p. 61.

[26] See Christopher Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen: Ichikawa Hakugen's Critique and Lingering Questions for Buddhist Ethics* (Honolulu, 2009), ch. 5, for a discussion of the various "apologies" that have emerged from various Buddhist sects since the early 1990s.

[27] See James L. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School* (Honolulu, 2001), p. 139; Andrew E. Barshay, "Postwar Social and Political Thought, 1945–90," in Bob T. Wakabayashi (ed.), *Modern Japanese Thought* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 273–355.

[28] See Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, 1997), for a highly engaging and informative (though controversial) attempt to deal with the issue of responsibility in the case of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. More recently, James Carroll, in *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews, A History* (Boston, 2002), attempts something similar with respect to the role of the Catholic Church in the history of Christian anti-Semitism. See Ian Buruma, *Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (London, 1995) for an analysis of the different ways in which these two nations have dealt with their wartime activities, and Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen*, for a brief but illuminating treatment of "war responsibility" *vis-à-vis* the writings of Ichikawa Hakugen.

has called the "*déformation professionelle*," which seems to affect prominent scholars everywhere when it comes to authoritarian political ideologies. Arendt provides evidence for this by pointing to the history of Western philosophy, where she sees an almost unbroken line of agreement and support with "tyrants and *Führers*."[29] Arendt's thesis is simple: philosophically-minded men intent on building abstract systems of thought frequently fall prey to the delusion that their ideas can or should find concrete application in political systems, particularly those which preach purity or single-mindedness as part of their ideology. Along the same lines, contemporary scholars like Robert Sharf, Jan van Bragt, and James Heisig have accused the Kyoto School thinkers of allowing their own critical philosophy to get caught up in the nationalistic winds sweeping Japan at the time.[30]

Japanese scholar and former diplomat Arima Tatsuo lends his support to Arendt's thesis: "The primary sin of a Nishida or a Watsuji was not that their ideal of harmony in the individual might be untenable, but that they confused the realities of politics with personal longings for serenity and harmony."[31] Elsewhere, Najita and Harootunian provide even harsher criticism of Kyoto School philosophical support for "Japanese fascism," suggesting that, especially as seen in the *Chūōkōron*[32] writings of the late 1930s and 1940s, we see "a thinly disguised justification, written in the language of Hegelian metaphysics, for Japanese aggression and continuing imperialism."[33] Heisig, in particular, has dealt with this issue in some detail, only to conclude:

> One has, deliberately or otherwise, to ignore the greatest bulk of the writings of these thinkers to arrive at the conclusion that anything approaching or supporting the imperialistic ideology of wartime Japan belongs to the fundamental inspiration of their thought. Insofar as any of them did willingly add support, it may be considered an aberration from their own intellectual goals.[34]

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29 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York, 1961), pp. 293–303.

30 See Robert Sharf, "Whose Zen? Zen Nationalism Revisited," in James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo (eds), *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu, 1994); Jan van Bragt, "Kyoto Philosophy—Intrinsically Nationalistic?" in James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo (eds), *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu, 1994).

31 Arima Tatsuo, *The Failure of Freedom: A Portrait of Modern Japanese Intellectuals* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 12.

32 Originally the name of a journal established in 1899, the title *Chūōkōron* came to be applied to a series of discussions held between various Japanese intellectuals (including Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime, and Nishitani Keiji) in 1943 and 1944, meant to serve as a "brain trust" for the Imperial Navy. See Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, p. 201.

33 Najita and Harootunian, "Japan's Revolt," pp. 238–9.

34 Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, p. 6.

Heisig is correct. It would indeed be misleading to suggest that Kyoto School "militarism" was somehow fundamental or essential to their project. However, the point is whether their role as philosophers and cultural critics required more than evasion. As Hakamaya and Matsumoto would ask (as did Tosaka Jun before them), what is the point of Nishidan "awareness" or "experience" without a practical/ethical element? Like Arendt and Arima, Heisig blames Nishida especially for "confusing" politics and "philosophy"—his "collapse into Japanism" occurred precisely where he entered the former realm, in which, as a pure philosopher, he had "nothing of much importance to add to."[35] In many respects, Tanabe went further than Nishida, boldly asserting that "our nation is the supreme archetype of existence and that, as a union of objective spirit and absolute spirit, it manifests the absolute as a Buddha-embodiment."[36] Despite the repentant tone of Tanabe's postwar magnum opus, *Zangedō toshite no tetsugaku* (Philosophy as Metanoetics, 1946), Andrew Barshay notes:

> It does not seem to have occurred to Tanabe that "contributionism," the willing provision by the intelligentsia of ideological resources to the state, might be a problem, or that refusal to serve might be a noble act and not merely the irresponsibility of the "bystander." It seems no less problematic that Tanabe continued to press for a single path for all Japanese. In the end, Tanabe remained locked in a world in which "the compassion of Other-power" might be underwritten by state coercion.[37]

Beyond these specific debates concerning the Kyoto School's involvement with militarist ideology, we must extend the issue to include the role and place of Buddhism within the development of modern Japanese nationalism. In this respect we may ask the following question: was Buddhism being used—i.e., misused—in service of an all-powerful nationalist ideology? Or, as Critical Buddhism and some others suggest, was the connection deeper than one of pure expediency, perhaps traceable to certain elements within Buddhism, specifically Buddhist doctrine itself? In order to examine this complex issue fruitfully, we need first to set the historical and political context for an understanding of so-called Imperial Way Buddhism (*kōdō bukkyō*).

Though Imperial Way Buddhism is a distinctly modern phenomenon, arising in the wake of the turmoil of the late Meiji period and reaching its climax during the height of Japanese militarism and imperialism in the 1930s, the phenomenon of close relations between Buddhism and the Japanese state dates back to the very origins of Buddhism in Japan.[38] A contemporary chronicle of the Nara

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35 Ibid., pp. 38, 88, 98–9.

36 Ibid., p. 99.

37 Barshay, "Postwar Social and Political Thought," p. 276.

38 See, e.g., Hori Ichirō, Ikado Fujio, Wakimoto Tsuneya, and Yanagawa Keiichi (eds), *Japanese Religion: A Survey by the Agency for Cultural Affairs* (New York, 1972), p. 51; Sallie B. King, *Buddha Nature* (Albany, 1991), p. 787.

period (710–794) states quite matter-of-factly that the wholesale adoption of Buddhism in the sixth century onwards was largely due to its being perceived as a religion "excellent for protecting the State."[39] The Taika Reforms (*Taika kaishin*) of 645 CE, which served to unite the country for the first time, also established Buddhism by putting all temples under quasi-jurisdiction of the Court as well as the local clans. A 741 CE edict promulgated by the Emperor Shōmu (r. 724–749), a devout Buddhist, sought to further unify politics and religion by nationalizing—i.e., bringing under direct court control—one temple (called *kokubunji*) in each of the 68 provinces or *kuni*. By the ninth century, the most powerful *kokubunji* were those in the Kyoto-Nara region, particularly Tōdaiji, Kōfukuji, and Enryakuji. At these temples court-appointed priests were instructed to pray for the peace and prosperity of the nation. Moreover, other temples were subsidized by the government as well as by the local clans by way of donations of land and servants, and thus gained increasingly in wealth and prosperity. Over time, the power and prestige of Buddhist temples grew, and by the late Heian period (794–1191), around the same time that various reformers began to lament the "degeneration" of Buddhism in Japan, this power took on a military mantle. From the tenth century through the thirteenth, the monks of the most powerful temples and shrines in the Kyoto and Nara regions frequently formed armed bands of *sōhei* (lit., soldier monks) to wage battle against not only rival temples but also occasionally even the imperial court itself.[40]

At this point we are led to ask: is this the inevitable result of what some scholars have called "secularized Buddhism"? While there may be some truth to this characterization, the "secularization thesis" can be criticized for evaluating medieval Japanese Buddhism in terms of modern, largely academic categories of religion—i.e., as something ideally separate from or beyond the vicissitudes of politics and economics.[41] In other words, the more interesting issue of the role of Buddhist doctrines in supporting violence is obscured by a blanket condemnation of politicized Buddhism of any sort. This may be overstepping the bounds of fair criticism. Satō Hirō and Taira Masayuki argue that behind the "secularization" of Buddhism in medieval Japan lies a doctrinal foundation based largely on *hongaku* or "original enlightenment." Taira, in particular, notes the justification of all sorts of monastic abuses on the basis of original enlightenment thought.

> Novices who were scions of the nobility, having received the secret transmission of arcane rites, were easily able to lord it over the most senior monks accomplished

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[39] George Sansom, *Japan: A Short Cultural History* (Stanford, 1986), p. 131.

[40] A good literary source for the fighting of this period can be found in the thirteenth-century classic *Heike Monogatari*.

[41] For more on this issue see Neil McMullin, "Historical and Historiographical Issues in the Study of Pre-Modern Japanese Religions," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 16/1 (1989): pp. 32–3; Jacqueline Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1999), p. 100.

> in difficult and austere practices. This was because of original enlightenment thought. The discourse of absolute affirmation found in original enlightenment thought readily translated into an immediate affirmation of personal desires, becoming an excuse for precept-breaking and the excesses of aristocratic monks. It was further employed to rationalize the attack and razing of rival temple-shrine complexes and became the intellectual basis for the activities of warrior monks.[42]

While it remains difficult to clearly decipher or ascertain the specific doctrinal causes or conditions for the phenomenon of the *sōhei*—or, as they were more derisively known, *akusō* (devil monks)—it is useful to see the *sōhei* as an early precedent for the fusion of politics and religion that was to once again emerge in the modern period. This study cannot explore in detail the historical relationship between Buddhism, power, and the state—such would be enough material for a set of lengthy volumes. Yet it is important to note that while the connection certainly has a long history, dating back at least to the Mauryan ruler Aśoka the Great (290–232 BCE), in Japan it became almost the single defining motif in the nation's religious history. Ichikawa Hakugen (1902–1986), in his analysis of 12 issues pertaining to the problematic relationship between Japanese Buddhism and society, notes the general historical relation between the state and Buddhism, particularly the emphasis on Buddhism as "protector of the state," an idea which he dates back to the Indian Mahāyāna sutras.[43] In *Imperial-Way Zen*, Christopher Ives builds on Ichikawa's critique, arguing that it is this notion—rather than any particular Buddhist doctrine—that is primarily responsible for Imperial Way Buddhism.[44]

In any case, the *sōhei* phenomenon diminished significantly in the Kamakura period (1185–1333), and came to an official end with Toyotomi Hideyoshi's government decree in 1588—the *katana-gari rei*—which forbade all men but samurai from possessing weapons. However, it may be in the more recent Edo period (1603–1868) that the deeper roots of Buddhist social discrimination, if not Buddhist sectarian violence, may be found:

> From 1635 (when the *tera-uke* [i.e., temple registration] system began) until 1871 (the year that legal enforcement of outcaste segregation officially ended), nearly all Buddhist temples … were legally obligated to function essentially as part of the police arm of the government in supervising local populations … This system aligned the religious authority of Buddhist temples with many of the worst features of government oppression.[45]

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[42] Quoted in Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, p. 84.

[43] Ichikawa Hakugen, *Bukkyōsha no sensō sekinin* (Tokyo, 1970).

[44] Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen*; see also David Brazier, *The New Buddhism* (London, 2002).

[45] William Bodiford, "Zen and the Art of Religious Prejudice: Efforts to Reform a Tradition of Social Discrimination," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 23 (1996): p. 7.

One of the most powerful "weapons" wielded by Buddhist temples in this regard was the practice of necrologies (*kakochō*), death registries that structure the memorial services to be performed for the dead over a period of several years, and which even today provide a large part of the income of many village temples. Striking a person's name from a registry, segregation of entries based on social status or religious affiliation, and giving more exalted posthumous Buddhist titles on the basis of social status are some of the main ways that discrimination became a part of the practice of necrologies.[46] These records continue to be used even today for family background checks by prospective marriage partners.[47] Elimination of such discriminatory death records has become a main concern for the Sōtō sect's Human Rights Division.[48]

In order to understand the place of violence and the martial spirit in Japanese tradition, we cannot fail to mention *bushidō*—the so-called samurai "way of the warrior." Despite its claims to antiquity, *bushidō* was only given full expression in the seventeenth century by military strategists and Confucian philosophers Yamaga Sokō (1622–1685) and Daidōji Yuzan (1639–1730), and the samurai Yamamoto Tsunetomo (1659–1715), the qualities emphasized in *bushidō* were not unlike the ideals presented in medieval European codes of chivalry, though without the element of romantic love, and with a more pronounced level of asceticism and emphasis on loyalty to one's military superior. Sometimes considered the father of the samurai way, Yamaga coined the phrase "The way of the warrior is found in death"—*bushidō to wa shinu koto*. Daidōji penned the *Code of the Samurai* (*Budō shoshinshū*, 1686),[49] a martial arts primer and guide, while Yamamoto wrote the classic *Hagakure*—a narration of his thoughts on being a samurai—late in his life, after he had renounced the world for a solitary life in a mountain heritage. Though the book was little known in the centuries after his death, it became extremely popular in the early Shōwa period, with the growth of militarism in Japan.[50] Though *bushidō* ethics were intended for soldiers and fighters, by the Meiji period some ideologues began to insist that these ideals were relevant to all loyal Japanese subjects—and may constitute nothing less than the very "soul of Japan."

In fact, the imposition of *bushidō* ideals onto the general population was part of a conscious effort by the Meiji and later Shōwa governments to instill patriotism and loyalty into the people. One necessary change made by Meiji ideologues was to redirect absolute loyalty towards the Emperor rather than to one's superior or feudal

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46 Ibid., pp. 8–9.

47 George De Vos and Hiroshi Wagatsuma (eds), *Japan's Invisible Race: Caste in Culture and Personality* (Berkeley, 1966).

48 Bodiford, "Zen and the Art," p. 10. The Human Rights Division—Jinken Yōgo Suishin Honbu—was established in 1982 to deal with problems of social discrimination in the Sōtō sect.

49 See Daidōji Yūzan, *Code of the Samurai: A Modern Translation of Budo Shoshinshu* (Boston, 1999).

50 See Yamamoto Tsunetomo, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai* (Tokyo, 1983).

lord—and this shift became central to the Shinto ultranationalism of the 1930s.[51] Not everyone is convinced of the power and influence of *bushidō*, however. Ruth Benedict argued that overemphasis on the impact of *bushidō* as a generalizable phenomenon is misleading, and ultimately "a publicist's inspiration."[52] Benedict's warning, and her use of the term publicist may be especially apt today, with the recent release of the Hollywood blockbuster, *The Last Samurai* (2003). Scholars of Japan have, for the most part, reacted with shock and anger at the film's historical inaccuracies—and even more at the romanticization of an ideal that was in fact a modern political construction, one which Luke Roberts notes "amounts to the fantasies about samurai and modernity that right-wing Japanese nationalists held in the 1930s and 40s."[53] At any rate, however "modern" and "invented" it may be as a tradition, there is little question that *bushidō* played a role in modern Japanese nationalism. From a Critical Buddhist perspective, the more pressing question is how "Buddhist" it was.

It is important to note that initially *bushidō* had no direct link to Buddhism, or even to Shinto, for that matter—most of its early proponents were Confucian or Neo-Confucian, like Yamaga, while one of its most effective modern proponents, Nitobe Inazō (1862–1933), was Christian.[54] This does not mean that there was no cross-fertilization, however. As we see in a number of D.T. Suzuki's writings, certain values of Buddhism—especially Zen, with its emphasis on mindfulness, concentration, calmness, and rigor—have long been used to solidify and support *bushidō* ethics.[55] While Nitobe's famous work cites Buddhism as the "first source" of *bushidō*—for the contribution of stoicism and resignation to fate—it also notes the contributions of Shinto (patriotism) and Confucianism (ethics).[56] Robert Bellah sees the warrior's adoption of Zen as a prime example of the (Japanese?) "tendency to value religion for its results in action rather than for its own sake."[57] Others, like Patrick Smith, have argued that the Japanese samurai's understanding of loyalty and filial piety fail to balance these with the primary Confucian virtue

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51 See Walter A. Skya, *Japan's Holy War: The Ideology of Radical Shinto Ultranationalism* (Durham and London, 2009); also Brian Victoria, *Zen War Stories* (London, 2003), pp. 126–7, for discussion of the role of *bushidō* in the army's 1941 *Field Service Code* (*Senjinkun*).

52 Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Boston, 1946), p. 175.

53 Luke Roberts, message to *H-Japan* internet discussion list, December 13, 2003 (h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-Japan&month=0312&week=b&msg=/4DCMvRiRUAx4nso1K%2b3pg&user=&pw= [accessed November 14, 2010]); see also Paul Dunscomb, "'The Last Samurai' Distorts Japan's Transition to Modernity," *Anchorage Daily News*, 12 December 2003.

54 Nitobe wrote *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (in English) in 1898; it was published in 1905. See Nitobe Inazo, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (Tokyo, 1998 [1898]).

55 See, e.g., Seisetsu Seki (1876–1945), *The Promotion of Bushido*, published in 1942.

56 Nitobe, *Bushido*, pp. 43–9.

57 Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Values of Pre-Industrial Japan* (Glencoe, 1957), pp. 16–17.

of humanity or benevolence.[58] Rinzai master Takuan (1573–1645), in a letter to his patron, the warrior and master swordsman Yagyū Tajima-no-kami Muneyoshi (1527–1606), wrote:

> The uplifted sword has no will of its own, it is all of emptiness. It is like a flash of lightning. The man who is about to be struck down is also of emptiness, and so is the one who wields the sword … Do not get your mind stopped with the sword you raise, forget about what you are doing, and strike the enemy. Do not keep your mind on the person before you. They are all of emptiness, but beware of your mind being caught in emptiness.[59]

Though this explicit conflation may have been rare in Takuan's time, by the late nineteenth century, the use of Zen to provide support for the (newly "democratized") way of the warrior had become fairly commonplace, and this tradition was continued through the Asia Pacific War.[60] Thus, the general ideology of *bushidō* played a significant role in the development of the ideals of modern Japanese militarism, though it is going too far to suggest, as some have, that *bushidō* is the single-most important causal factor to Imperial Way Zen.[61]

Let us turn now to the Meiji Restoration (*Meiji ishin*) of 1868, which shaped the course of modern Japanese history—including the course of Buddhism and Japanese nationalism—well into the twentieth century. This change in governmental structure was in fact less a "restoration" than "a complete revolution, which affected all levels of society."[62] In what surely remains a unique historical event, a self-appointed new government in that year effectively invented a modern nation out of what was largely a feudal assemblage of warring states. This invention involved not only the centralization of authority, both literally and symbolically, in the Emperor, but also the drive to modernize Japan—to create an industrial and military power to rival those of the West. Some *bakumatsu* (i.e., late-Edo-period) intellectuals such as Sakuma Shōzan (1811–1864) had already promoted the social doctrine of *tōyō dōtoku seiyō gakugei* (or *geijutsu*)—"Eastern ethos and Western technologies." In the period leading up to the Restoration, this idea was developed

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58 Patrick Smith, *Japan: A Reinterpretation* (New York, 1997), p. 50.

59 Quoted in Harvey, *Buddhist Ethics*, p. 268.

60 See, e.g., Nukariya Kaiten, *Religion of the Samurai: A Study of Zen Philosophy and Discipline in China in Japan* (Tokyo, 1913); Victoria, *Zen War Stories*, pp. 118–19.

61 See Brian Victoria, *Zen at War* (New York, 1997), p. 95; Christopher Ives, "Protect the Dharma, Protect the Country: Buddhist War Responsibility and Social Ethics," *Eastern Buddhist*, 33/2 (2001): p. 20.

62 Nishijima Gūdō, "Japanese Buddhism and the Meiji Restoration—With an Introduction to Master Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*." (Online, 1997). Available at: www.dogensangha.org/downloads/Pdf/AAR.pdf [accessed November 14, 2010], p. 3. The Japanese term *ishin* (lit., "new ties") implies something more radical and transformative than the English "restoration." See Sharf, "Whose Zen?" p. 47, for remarks on the "paradox" of modern nationalism.

further by political activists such as Hashimoto Sanai (1831–1859) and Yokoi Shōnan (1809–1869), both of whom eventually fell victim to assassination.[63]

And yet, as many have noted, there was a note of deep and abiding ambiguity at the heart of the Restoration, "between the capacity of an indigenous culture to withstand change and the claims of new knowledge demanding transformation."[64] Here James Heisig's insightful remarks are worth quoting:

> As the [Restoration] leadership grew more confident, it spread its authority in two very different if not contradictory directions made to look complementary. On the one hand it guided the education system to preserve the traditional values that had been the bulwark of social harmony … On the other hand, the government was determined to build itself up militarily to protect its prosperity … All of these factors came into play within the sphere of a single generation, seeding the Japanese soul with the makings of a mass neurosis of preoccupation with its own identity. Thereon hangs the tale of the spiritual environment that twentieth-century Japan inherited and whose symptoms were to provoke not only social upheavals and ideological nationalism in Japan but also to lay the foundations for its modern intellectual history.[65]

Indeed, the legacy left by the Meiji Restoration was mixed, almost "schizophrenic," in the popular understanding of the term, yet deep enough that it lingers in the cultural air of Japan even today, a century and a half later. However, as noted above, the driving impulse of the Meiji reformers was not itself "foreign" to Japanese tradition: "reform" here meant, as it always had in the Japanese political context, borrowing, adapting, and reshaping what was considered best from the "highest" civilizations in order to protect and support the Japanese nation. If in the past this role had been played by the dynasties of China (and to a lesser extent, via Buddhism, the kingdoms of Korea and India), after 1868 it had clearly become the West. Thus, for all its ambiguity, the early years of the Restoration were characterized by a remarkable openness to Western ideas as well as technologies.

By the mid-1880s, however, the inevitable conservative reaction began to set in. While the internationalism and cosmopolitan spirit of the 1870s did not disappear, it was, for the rest of the Meiji period, considerably muted. Earlier progressive reforms were nullified, dissidents silenced, and the ranks of the elite largely closed once again. Indeed, the solidification of the growing conservatism of Meiji times can be dated to two specific documents: the Imperial Constitution of Great Japan (*Dai nihon teikoku kenpō*, 1889) and the Imperial Rescript on Education (*Kyōiku*

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63 See Hirakawa Sukehiro, "Japan's Turn to the West," in Bob T. Wakabayashi (ed.), *Modern Japanese Thought* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 42.

64 Najita and Harootunian, "Japan's Revolt," p. 208; see also Wakabayashi, "Introduction," p. 3.

65 Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, pp. 10–11.

chokugo, 1890).[66] As Wakabayashi notes, these two "sacred texts" enshrined the *kokutai*, or national polity/essence, and severely limited the possibility of debate and open criticism.[67] At one level, of course, post-revolutionary conservatism is nothing new (see e.g., France, ca. 1793; Russia, ca. 1925). At the same time, we must be cautious when it comes to blanket categorizations of this incredibly diverse and complex period. While the phrase "Meiji conservatism" may have general application to the period from the early 1890s through the beginning of Taishō (1912), it should be noted that the kind of organic culturalism propounded by most "conservatives" in Japan at the time, and well into the twentieth century, was neither simply "anti-Western" nor "anti-modern."

With the restoration of the Emperor came a desire on the part of some to restore to prominence the "indigenous" religion of Japan, Shinto. In the preceding Edo period, the ruling shoguns had adopted Buddhism as the *de facto* state religion.[68] In response to this, some Shintoists, borrowing heavily from critiques of Buddhism from Edo-period Neo-Confucians as well as *kokugaku* or Native Studies scholars, felt compelled to launch a sustained critique of Buddhism as non-Japanese under the slogan "*Haibutsu kishaku*!" (lit., "Throw away Buddha and abolish Śākyamuni!"). However, as its would-be persecutors quickly discovered, Buddhism was not about to be so easily disestablished without causing severe disruptions to the national fabric. After a short period of severe persecution (1868–1873), the government generally abandoned its zero tolerance towards Buddhism. Thus, official attitudes towards Buddhism and the specific relations between Buddhism and Shinto shifted much during the final years of the nineteenth century, while "the Buddhist world was buffeted and tossed about by the policies of the government."[69] Even after the end of the initial burst of persecution, the growing nationalism of the period placed increasing pressure on Buddhism to prove itself as a truly national religion. In 1889, Buddhist leaders from all of Japan's major sects, including not a few figures who had been involved in the so-called Buddhist Enlightenment, joined to create the United Movement for Revering the Emperor and Worshipping the Buddha (Sonno Hōbutsu Daidōdan)—whose intent was "to preserve the prosperity of the Imperial Household and increase the power of Buddhism[70]—and actively participated in

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66 See Hirakawa, "Japan's Turn," p. 94; Minami Hiroshi, *Nihonjinron: Meiji kara konnichi made* (Tokyo, 1994), pp. 137–83; Najita and Harootunian, "Japan's Revolt," pp. 210–11; Itō Miyoji (trans.), "The Constitution of the Empire of Japan (1889)," in Itō Hirobumi (ed.), *Commentaries on the Constitution of the Empire of Japan* (Tokyo, 1889); Robert Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (Berkeley, 1970), p. 106, for a translation of the Imperial Rescript.

67 See Wakabayashi, "Introduction," pp. 11–14.

68 See Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion*, pp. 39–40.

69 Ishikawa Rikizan, "The Social Response of Buddhists to the Modernization of Japan: The Contrasting Lives of Two Sōtō Zen Monks," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 25 (1998): p. 88.

70 Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. 18.

whipping up nationalist sentiment through the Great Teaching (*Daikyō*) campaign of 1871, in which 80 percent of "doctrinal instructors" were Buddhist priests.[71]

In 1894, Japan and China became engaged in a war over the Korean peninsula. Thus began a period of intermittent hostilities between the two countries that would last for 50 years, and whose impact can still be felt today. Within Japan, response to the outbreak of war was enthusiastic on virtually all sides of the socio-political spectrum. The Meiji regime, supported by intellectuals and public figures of all stripes, had for some time been propagating the notion of a "Japanese essence" (*kokusui*) connected with loyalty to the nation and Emperor. This ideology, which came to be called "Japanism" (*Nihonshugi*), denoted a belief in the cultural, spiritual, military, and sometimes, in its more extreme forms, racial superiority of the Japanese people. The term *Nihonshugi* came to prominence in 1897 due to the writings of nationalists like the writer and critic Takayama Chogyū (Rinjirō) (1871–1902), and scholars Kimura Takatarō (1870–1931) and Inoue Tetsujirō (1855–1944). Within the rhetoric of Japanism, foreign ideals were not simply rejected, but severely criticized as both inferior and dangerous. Japanese people were urged to follow the Japanese way of life, and to avoid all other—especially Western—ways.

In his article on "Buddhism and the Kami," Matsumoto Shirō defines *Nihonshugi* as a theory espousing "the location of ultimate or absolute value in Japan."[72] It could be argued that Japanism dates back at least to Nichiren (1222–1282), one of several highly successful Buddhist innovators of the Kamakura period. A fierce prophet in the style of the biblical Isaiah and Ezekiel, Nichiren criticized the doctrines of the rival Jōdo sect as fragmentary, objected to the cult of faith in Amida Buddha, ridiculed Shingon esotericism as superstitious nonsense, and derided Zen meditation as insufficient at best. He went further to insist that his own *Hokke* (i.e., *Lotus Sutra*-based) sect should be adopted as the state religion, calling on the government to suppress deviant doctrines and establish Japan as the "Land of Truth." Moreover, Nichiren believed that this Truth would subsequently spread from Japan to embrace the whole world, reversing the spiritual decline of the day (*mappō*) and ushering forth the Pure Land of Śākyamuni Buddha on earth. Though there are certainly precedents for the notion of Japanese cultural, spiritual and ethnic if not racial superiority dating back to very early contacts with foreigners, the ideology was more clearly formulated by the nativist movement of the eighteenth century called *kokugaku* (Native Studies), spearheaded by Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801).[73]

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71 Brian Victoria, "When God(s) and Buddhas Go to War" (unpublished manuscript, 2002), p. 8.

72 Matsumoto Shirō, "Buddhism and the Kami: Against Japanism," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 357.

73 See Gene Blocker and Christopher Starling, *Japanese Philosophy* (Albany, 2001), p. 106, for an analysis of Norinaga as a "Shinto fundamentalist." See Harry Harootunian,

Along with other nativists such as Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843), Norinaga often employed Buddhism as a foil for arguments about the true Japanese spirit. Atsutane's *Tamadasuki* (1832), in attempting to show how neglect of the ancient ways led to the decline of the Imperial institution, cites Buddhism as the chief agent for this neglect, listing off the many sins of Buddhism in Japan (e.g., undermining filiality, opposing the naturalness of the passions, and undermining family harmony, trust among friends and servants). There are many factors involved in the development of the *kokugaku* movement, such as the increasing power and threat of Western culture (including Western technology), and the penetration of Neo-Confucianism in Japan from China. During this period the West effectively replaced China as the Other (presumed to be in some ways superior) culture against which Japan would come to define itself—both with and against. As had been the case with China, "it was the representation of the 'other' that clarified for the Japanese the essence of their own culture … If the 'other' defined what was exceptional in Japanese culture, it also offered a model of excellence against which such distinctiveness could be measured."[74] Whatever its ultimate origins, by the early twentieth-century Japanism had emerged as shorthand for the nationalistic understanding of Japanese cultural superiority, and was subsequently channeled into the war effort, leading to a kind of "manifest destiny" approach to military conquest.

Given these trends, it is hardly surprising that it was also around the time of the Sino-Japanese War that the particular phenomenon of "Imperial Way Zen" (*kōdōzen*) became apparent for the first time. A young D.T. Suzuki wrote:

> There is a violent country [i.e., China], and insofar as it obstructs our commerce and infringes upon our rights, it directly interrupts the progress of all humankind. In the name of religion, our country refuses to submit itself to this. For this reason, unavoidably we have taken up arms. For the sake of justice and justice alone, we are simply chastising the country that represents injustice, and there is nothing else we seek. *This is a religious action*.[75]

Things Seen and Unseen: Discourse and Ideology in Tokugawa Nativism (Chicago and London, 1988), p. 221.

[74] Najita and Harootunian, "Japan's Revolt," p. 207.

[75] Quoted in Christopher Ives, "Ethical Pitfalls in Imperial Zen and Nishida Philosophy: Ichikawa Hakugen's Critique," in James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo (eds), *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu, 1994), p. 17, emphasis mine. Ives's translation of this particular passage has been challenged by Hagiwara Takao ("Japan and the West in D.T. Suzuki's Nostalgic Double Journeys," *Eastern Buddhist, New Series*, 33/2 [2001]: pp. 129–51). While Hagiwara raises some valid points about Western readings of Suzuki and Zen, this essay is marred, like Suzuki's own works, by a heavy-handed emphasis on East-West-ism, and the familiar, unsupportable contention that "the Western mindset is dualistic … that of the East or Japan, non-dualistic" (p. 130).

Suzuki does not mince words. The war with China, he claims, is *not* a war for resources or a necessary defense against encroaching Western colonialism, as was (and remains) the common refrain. Nor is it borne out of aggression or belligerence. It is rather an act of righteous chastisement. As such, it must be seen as part of Japan's *religious* mandate, which clearly extends beyond its national borders and into the very lands from which Buddhism once came to Japan.

By 1904, Japan was again at war, this time fulfilling what just a generation before would have been a vain hope. Not only were the Imperial forces able to equitably battle a European power, they were able to hand the Russians a resounding defeat. The boost this war gave to national pride was enormous: only a generation after the Restoration, Japan had officially become a world power. According to Ichikawa Hakugen, during the Russo-Japanese conflict Imperial Way Zen grew apace with the boost to national confidence. Around this time, Suzuki's earlier remarks about the religious underpinnings of Japanese military activity in China were given a more explicit Buddhist foundation, as can be seen in the following remarks by scholar-priest and Buddhist Enlightenment figure Inoue Enryō (1858–1919):

> Buddhism is a teaching of compassion, a teaching for living human beings. Therefore, fighting on behalf of living human beings is in accord with the spirit of compassion. In the event hostilities break out between Japan and Russia, it is only natural that Buddhists should fight willingly, for what is this if not repaying the debt of gratitude we owe the Buddha? It goes without saying that this is a war to protect the state and sustain our fellow countrymen. Beyond that, however, it is the conduct of a Bodhisattva seeking to save untold millions of living souls throughout China and Korea from the jaws of death. Therefore Russia is not only the enemy of our country, it is also the enemy of the Buddha … [O]n the one hand this is a war of politics and on the other hand it is a war of religion … If theirs is the army of God, then ours is the army of the Buddha.[76]

Yet it was not until the early 1930s, when Japan again became engaged in outright hostilities with China in Manchuria, that the rhetoric of Imperial Way Zen reached its most virulent heights.[77] In 1934, Sōtō Zen priest Iida Tōin (1863–1937) declared: "There is no Buddha-Dharma apart from loyalty … The Imperial wind and the Buddha's sun are nondual."[78] Reflecting Suzuki's earlier remarks, Iida went on to urge Buddhists to relish "how much power Zen gave to the Way

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[76] Quoted in Victoria, "When God(s) and Buddhas," pp. 10–11; see Nukariya, *Religion of the Samurai*, pp. xiii–vvi.

[77] As this matter is chronicled in great detail in Brian Victoria's works, especially *Zen at War* (1997), and more recently in the introductory chapter to Christopher Ives's *Imperial-Way Zen* (2009), a few examples should suffice here.

[78] Quoted in Ives, "Ethical Pitfalls," p. 18.

of the Warrior." Harada Sōgaku (1871–1961), a Sōtō Zen master who receives favorable treatment in a number of Western studies, wrote in 1939, "[If ordered to] march: tramp, tramp, or shoot: bang, bang. This is the manifestation of the highest Wisdom [of Enlightenment]. The unity of Zen and war of which I speak extends to the farthest reaches of the holy war [now under way]."[79] Harada's disciple, Yasutani Haku'un (1885–1973), carried on his master's transmission by noting that, when considering the precept that forbids the taking of life, "Those who understand the spirit of the Mahāyāna precepts should be able to answer the question immediately":

> That is to say, of course one should kill, killing as many as possible. One should, fighting hard, kill everyone in the enemy army … Failing to kill an evil man who ought to be killed, or destroying an enemy army that ought to be destroyed, would be to betray compassion and filial obedience, to break the precept forbidding the taking of life … In killing [the enemy] one should swallow one's tears, bearing in mind the truth of killing and not killing.[80]

While tending towards the extreme, such comments as these are not by any means unrepresentative of a significant trend within Japanese Buddhism and Zen in the period up to and including the Asia Pacific War.[81] Indeed, Buddhism contributed a number of slogans to the ultranationalist cause, including *shinzoku nitai* ("undivided obedience to religious and political institutions"), *chingo kokka* ("pacify and protect the country [via Buddhism]"), and *kōzen gokoku* ("protect the country by protecting Zen").[82] While there were a few voices raised against this form of Buddhist militarism, even early critics like Ōtani Sonyū (1886–1939) eventually either fell silent or revoked their critical stance.[83] In addition to their involvement in propaganda activities (*kyōka undō*), from the 1920s through the 1940s, Buddhist priests and leaders:

> Organized and/or participated actively in patriotic groups; exhorted parishioners to "serve the public" (*hōkō*) by enlisting, practicing austerity on the home front, and buying war bonds; engaged in monthly "patriotic alms-begging" (*hōkoku takuhatsu gongyō*); donated temple funds for the construction of warplanes; ran officer-training programs; performed

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[79] Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. x; see also Fujii Tadatoshi, *Heitachi no sensō* (Tokyo, 2001).

[80] Quoted in Victoria, "Engaged Buddhism," p. 18.

[81] See Yoshida Kyūichi, *Nihon no kindai-shakai to bukkyō* (Tokyo, 1970); Kashiwahara Yūsen, *Nihon bukkyō-shi, kindai* (Tokyo, 1990).

[82] Winston Davis, "Buddhism and the Modernization of Japan," *History of Religions*, 28/4 (1989): p. 306; see also Tsurumi Shunsuke, *A Cultural History of Postwar Japan, 1945–1980* (London and New York, 1967).

[83] See Victoria, "When God(s) and Buddhas," p. 15, for the case of Ōtani.

> ceremonies and chanted sutras to promote Japanese victory; assisted the families of the war dead; served as chaplains for troops fighting overseas; and helped "pacify" (*senbu*) occupied and colonized areas and mold colonized Asians into imperial subjects (*kōminka*).[84]

All of this raises the question as to whether the Asia Pacific War can be understood as a (Shinto-Buddhist) holy war (*seisen*) in the sense often used to refer to Christian and Muslim military ventures. According to James Turner Johnson, there are three distinct criteria for establishing whether a conflict can reasonably be called a holy war:

1. That the war have a transcendent authority, either given directly from God or mediated through the religious institutions in some way;
2. That the war have a purpose directly associated with religion, either its defense or its propagation or the establishment of a social order in accord with religious requirements;
3. That the war be waged by people who are in some sense set apart, whether culturally or morally or simply by membership in the religious community, from those against whom the war is waged.[85]

All of these conditions, with certain allowances made for the differences in Japanese and Western understandings of religion, are met by the Asia Pacific War. On the flipside, for many Japanese writers at the time, the war was not precisely a holy war so much as a "just war." Many Japanese intellectuals—even those who did not see the conflict in explicitly religious terms—saw the war in Asia as a war of liberation, one not merely justified but necessary. Japan, as the self-proclaimed single remaining uncolonized nation of the East, was destined to break the shackles of Western—and particularly Anglo-Saxon—colonialism, liberating Asia into a realm of peace and freedom euphemistically dubbed the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (*Dai Tōa Kyōei Ken*). The authors of a work entitled *The Buddhist View of War* turn a phrase which bears striking accord with the mantra of many Western just war theorists: "The reason … for fighting a war is not to continue war, but to eliminate war."[86] This issue requires further analysis; based less on a Western approach than ideals held within Buddhist and Japanese traditions themselves. Brian Victoria too-readily conflates the concepts of just and holy war—as if the former were *ipso facto* simply a euphemistic expression of the latter. It is not. In this regard, the recent volume by Michael Jerryson and Mark

84 Ives, "Protect the Dharma," p. 16.

85 James Turner Johnson, "Historical Roots and Sources of the Just War Tradition in Western Culture," in John Kelsay and James Turner Johnson (eds), *Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions* (Westport, 1991), pp. 3–30.

86 See Victoria, *Zen War Stories*, pp. 228–31.

Juergensmeyer, *Buddhist Warfare*, is a much-needed contribution to the study of religious violence.[87]

At the same time, precedent for thinking of Japanese military activity in terms of holy war had been earlier set by Edo-period *kokugaku* scholars and was continued in later periods by Shinto ultranationalists of various stripes.[88] In *Shinmin no michi* (The Way of the Subject), a major government edict issued just four months before the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, military ideologues dwelled on the direct descent of the emperor from the Sun Goddess Amaterasu and characterized the national polity as a "theocracy" in which "the way of the subject is to be loyal to the Emperor in disregard of self, thereby supporting the Imperial Throne coextensive with the Heavens and with the Earth."[89] In short, this vision emphasized that Japan had a special, divinely inspired mandate to guide other Asian nations to "enlightenment," and that it was Japan's duty as the big brother of Asia to save its siblings from the rampaging West—a threat which, while exaggerated for polemical purposes, was unquestionably real.[90] In order to fulfill this mission, however, Japan must adopt Western technology, while attempting to retain its own cultural and spiritual assets. Accompanying this sense of political mission came an emphasis on the essential similarity of the "Yamato race" (*Yamato minzoku*) or simply the "100 million" (*ichioku*), i.e., the entire Japanese people.

The intellectual shift from mid-Taishō to the 1930s was a shift from cosmopolitanism to "culturalism" (*bunkashugi*)—a term which refers not only to the views of the radical right and military ideologues, but also to many pronouncements coming from mainstream intellectuals, writers, religious and political leaders. More complex than simply a superficial ideology to justify military expansion, proponents of this 1930s culturalism quite earnestly—one might say, naïvely—sought a definition and understanding of modern Japanese culture and the values undergirding such.[91] Within this intellectual trend we see a highly Romantic and Idealist spirit, particularly in the contrast between *culture* (meaning creative self-realization, depth of spirit, and aesthetic value) and *civilization* (meaning the rational, material, pragmatic, but ultimately spiritually vacuous wisdom of the modern industrial West). Here, as with most intellectual

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87 Michael Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer (eds), *Buddhist Warfare* (Oxford, 2010).

88 See Skya, *Japan's Holy War*, for a recent discussion of Shinto ultranationalism and "holy war."

89 Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, p. 277.

90 As Arisaka Yōko notes, despite the recent apologies on the part of Japanese politicians for wartime aggression and atrocities in Asia, justification of the war as the "'liberation of Asia from Western imperial powers' still enjoys considerable support among the conservative sector of society today" (Arisaka Yōko, "The Nishida Enigma: 'The Principle of the New World Order' (1943)," *Monumenta Nipponica*, 51/1 [1996]: p. 1; see also David Sanger, "Coloring History Their Own Way," *New York Times Magazine*, July, 2 1995).

91 Najita and Harootunian, "Japan's Revolt," pp. 232–3.

trends dating back to the 1870s, the influence of Western idealist philosophies can hardly be overemphasized. After the Restoration, Western philosophy—specifically German thought—was, somewhat ironically, among the main imports that helped to shape modern Japanese nationalism. This became especially true in the 1890s, after the Imperial Rescript on Education. Basil Hall Chamberlain's *Things Japanese* (1890) and Miyake Setsurei's *Shinzenbi Nipponjin* (The Japanese: Truth, Goodness and Beauty, 1891) are classic statements of something we might term modernist Japanism.[92] Takayama Chogyū, one of the main spokesmen of the *kokusui hozon* (Preservation of the National Essence) movement, whose "first aim was to enhance the aspiration for establishing an empire," recognized the importance of Hegel for Japanese nationalist ideology, in particular the notion that "[t]he individual had to reach his fulfillment through the state."[93] Hegel's work also had an impact on Okakura Tenshin (1862–1913), the fierce critic of Japan's Westernization who called for a joint Asian defense against Western imperialism, under the motto: "Our recovery is consciousness … Our remedy is the sword."[94] Okakura (born Okakura Kakuzō, 1862–1913), art historian and leading cultural figure, wrote *The Ideals of the East* (1902) and *The Book of Tea* (1903), and was perhaps the first, decades before D.T. Suzuki and Watsuji Tetsurō, to pronounce upon the cultural distinctiveness and superiority of Asian culture, within which Japan was the "key to this great cultural code." Contemporary critic Kuno Osamu has outlined how German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies's (1855–1936) writings on the distinction between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* were adopted in the early twentieth-century by a number of Japanese thinkers, "because the relatively simple description of social development leading from an agrarian community to a state-like society appeared suitable for Japan's contemporary needs."[95] In *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), Tönnies distinguished between two basic types of social groups, based on two basic forms of human will: the essential will, which is the underlying, organic, or instinctive driving force; and the arbitrary will, which is deliberative, purposive, and future or goal-oriented. Groups that form around essential will, in which membership is self-fulfilling, he called *Gemeinschaft* (often translated as community); those in which membership was sustained by some instrumental goal he termed *Gesellschaft* (often translated as society).[96]

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92 Along with Inoue Enryō and Shimaji Mokurai, Miyake Setsurei (1860–1945) founded the Seikyōsha (Political Teaching Alliance) in 1888, as well as the influential journal *Nihonjin*.

93 Quoted in Gino Piovesana, *Recent Japanese Philosophical Thought 1862–1962: A Survey* (Tokyo, 1969), pp. 238–9.

94 Quoted in Najita and Harootunian, "Japan's Revolt," pp. 211–12.

95 Steffi Richter and Kitagawa Sakiko, "Gespräch mit Osamu Kuno," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 6/44 (1996): pp. 1028–30.

96 See Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society* (New York, 1957); see also Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, *Place and Dream: Japan and the Virtual* (Amsterdam, 2004), p. 156.

Matsumoto Shirō argues that one of the key documents in the establishment of Japanism as an entrenched ideology was the *Kokutai no hongi* (Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan), published in March 1937.[97] Significantly, *Kokutai no hongi* does not reject Buddhism as a foreign religion, as might be expected given the growing Shinto-based nationalist spirit, but rather attempts to absorb Buddhism into a homogeneous Japanese spirit or essence—the *kokusui*. As some writers have noted, this was a forbidding task indeed:

> Given the polychromatic character of Japan's cultural past, it was difficult [for Japanese "particularists" of the Meiji period] to identify this cultural essence [*kokusui*] … Unlike China, which boasted of an easily identifiable great tradition, Japan had none. Where then, were the Seikyōsha writers to find the *kokusui*—in the myths and legends of the Shintō tradition, in the sensibilities of Heian culture, in the harsh ethos of the warrior class, in the boisterous arts of Tokugawa townsmen, or in the austere puritanism of Tokugawa Confucianism?[98]

Matsumoto also cites comments from Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro (leader from 1982 to 1987) and philosopher Umehara Takeshi, both of whom insist that Buddhism was "adapted to the Japanese spirit."[99] In this way, the tension between Buddhism and Shinto that had existed since the Restoration was largely resolved, but at the expense of the possibility of Buddhist criticism of government policies, at least at the institutional level.

Besides the matter of Buddhist contributions to political ideologies supportive of violence or warfare, another issue raised by Critical Buddhism is the more subtle but perhaps even more persistent problem of the role played by Japanese Buddhism in cultivating or sustaining attitudes and practices of social discrimination. Indeed, as mentioned above, the spark that gave birth to Critical Buddhism was the Machida Incident, which revolved around the question of the *burakumin*—the so-called "outcastes" of Japanese society. *Burakumin* (lit., "village folk") are more often referred to in Japanese history as *eta-hinin* (lit., "polluted non-persons")—or occasionally simply *yotsu* (lit., "four-legged ones"). The plight of Japan's so-called "invisible race," numbering today perhaps two to three million, has become publicized in recent decades, though, as with the Dalits in India, legislation eliminating discrimination *de jure* has not erased the deeper *de facto* social discrimination against these people. Machida's remark was an explicit denial that there is any such problem of discrimination

[97] See Robert King Hall (ed.), *Kokutai no hongi: Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan* (Cambridge, 1974 [1949]), for a translation of this document.

[98] Peter Duus and Irwin Scheiner, "Socialism, Liberalism, Marxism," in Bob T. Wakabayashi (ed.), *Modern Japanese Thought* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 130–31.

[99] Matsumoto, "Buddhism and the Kami," p. 364.

or unfair treatment of *burakumin* in contemporary Japan.[100] Yet, by all accounts, this claim is far from the truth, as Machida himself eventually realized.

It is important to recognize that any critique of Buddhist support of warfare or outright violence must also take into account the more subtle means of "violence" couched in social institutions or practices that support and even cause discrimination—what Engaged Buddhists along with their Liberation Theology cousins call "structural" or "systemic" violence. It is important to recognize that "peace" itself, i.e., lack of warfare, does not entail that a community or nation is "good" or "just" according to Buddhist ideals. At the same time, a Buddhist critique of social injustice and discrimination would seem to require slightly different tools than a Buddhist critique of violence, which may stick largely to an emphasis on the centrality of compassion and the precept against taking life. Although E.F. Schumacher[101] and David Brazier[102] have argued that the Buddha himself provided workable blueprints for social and economic reform, most scholars are less willing to grant that historical Buddhism, in its earlier or later forms, was quite so concerned with such matters; indeed, this may be one reason why *saṇgha*-state relations seem to have come so naturally.

In Japan, it appears that Buddhism—Machida, Hakamaya, and Matsumoto's Sōtō Zen sect in particular—has played a large role in supporting and maintaining a culture or systematic discrimination against *burakumin*, one that is only now slowly beginning to be eliminated. In response to recent pressure and very public criticism by the aggressively activist Buraku Liberation League,[103] the Sōtō sect has established a Human Rights Division to tackle the problem, focusing their efforts on the common practice of discriminatory necrologies and posthumous Buddhist names in particular. Although mainly concerned with the issue of unfair treatment of the *burakumin*, it appears that women, the physically handicapped, and foreigners received similar treatment in Sōtō memorial registers. As Bodiford notes, the Machida Incident and its aftermath helped to inspire a thorough reform within the Sōtō sect:

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[100] Ironically, the very day I read Alldritt's article explaining how some *burakumin* have recently abandoned Buddhism for new religions such as Tenrikyō, which explicitly rejects the doctrine of karmically-driven rebirth, I came across a BBC article on the continuing phenomenon of mass conversions of Indian Dalits from Hinduism to Buddhism, for exactly the same reasons. See Leslie Alldritt, "The *Burakumin:* The Complicity of Japanese Buddhism in Oppression and an Opportunity for Liberation," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 7 (2000); Rajeev Khanna, "Gujarat Hindus Embrace Buddhism," *BBC News*, 5 October 2003; Bodiford, "Zen and the Art."

[101] E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York, 1974).

[102] Brazier, *The New Buddhism*.

[103] The Buraku Liberation League (Buraku Kaihō Dōmei) was founded in 1922, but given the circumstances of the period did not emerge as a unified and effective social force until the 1960s.

> As the anti-discrimination campaign gained momentum it discredited the older generation of Sōtō leaders who had allied themselves with prewar notions of social hierarchy and class privilege, while helping empower the younger generation of Sōtō Zen activists in their attempt to make the sect face current issues of social and political injustice.[104]

One tangible result of this has been the publication of a series of books by Komazawa University on topics such as "Religion and Discrimination," "Discrimination and Human Rights," "Religion and Human Rights," and "[Sōtō] Doctrines and Discrimination."[105]

How are we to account for this discriminatory tradition within Japanese Buddhism? On one level, again, we might simply ascribe it to forces of conservatism or syncretism: traditional cultural values from Shinto (e.g., purity rules and taboos concerning the handling of corpses and dead animals) having infiltrated Japanese Buddhism eventually solidified into practices that, over time, were no longer even questioned as being non-Buddhist. Yet this would be too simple, given that at least part of the discrimination against *burakumin* in Japan appears to have been imported from or at least strongly influenced by foreign customs, namely, the Indian caste-system. Since Buddhism was the primary source of Indian culture in East Asia and Japan, we can say that Buddhism itself—or at least some of Buddhism's own cultural baggage—played an important role in the development of the notion of Japanese outcastes. Yet, according to Leslie Alldritt, despite the early influence of Buddhism and Indian cultural ideas, modern and existing practices of discrimination are in fact relatively new, in the sense that they evolved slowly over a long period and were affected by a wide variety of factors. "It was during the Tokugawa Period (1603–1868) that specific discriminatory policies arose toward the *burakumin*, and … the *burakumin* became established as a discriminated-against group."[106] It was only during the eighteenth century that physical separation of such communities into the ghettos, where many remain today, was first established. This was also the beginning of family registries that recorded the status of the so-called *eta* and *hinin*, which practice had the effect of formally codifying and in effect "essentializing" outcaste status to a person and family in perpetuity. "With the use of registries, the incidence of pollution within certain occupations became stigmatized and permanent in that not only was an individual deemed as inherently impure, but so too his or her family name."[107] Though not identical, this process of substantializing discrimination—rendering it "natural" in a way that had not been done before—parallels the process happening in Europe and America at the same time, whereby racism and discrimination based

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104 Bodiford, "Zen and the Art," p. 5.

105 Respectively: *Shūkyō to sabetsu*, 9 vols; *Sabetsu to jinken*, 7 vols; *Shūkyō to jinken*, 3 vols; and *Kyōgaku to sabetsu*, 2 vols.

106 Alldritt, "The *Burakumin*," p. 4.

107 Ibid., p. 5.

on sexual preference became naturalized for the first time. Indeed, the tendency to justify discrimination on the basis of nature appears to be largely a modern conception, related no doubt to the rise of science as a discipline.

Yet here, as well, Buddhist ideas play a supporting role, particularly the combination of the ancient doctrine of *karma* and the notion of *icchantika* (Jp. *issendai*).[108] Whereas the former was frequently used to justify the fact of discrimination (just as it has been used in various Asian societies to "explain" social ills such as poverty or prostitution) in terms of a simple formula of just deserts, the latter has the more pernicious implication that some folks are simply beyond the pale when it comes to Buddhist liberation.[109] An *icchantika* is defined in Chinese Buddhist tradition as a being "who has cut off the good roots" (Ch. *duanshangen*) or "lacking in the necessary faith" (Ch. *xinbujuzu*). In other words, this concept, developed primarily in the Yogācāra school, denotes a class of beings lacking "the basic causes and conditions for becoming a Buddha."[110] Of course, the major Japanese Mahāyāna sects to enter Japan, such as Tendai and Kegon, disagreed with this theory, but its existence, and the fact that it was a matter of great debate for some time in China and Japan, indicates a lingering sense that buddhahood was not for all.

Let us conclude our discussion of the historical and religious context that gave birth to Critical Buddhism by noting that the attempt at a critical appraisal of early Shōwa culturalism and Imperial Way Buddhism on the part of Buddhist scholars did not originate with the work of Hakamaya and Matsumoto. Directly after the war, Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990) wrote of the decline of Buddhism in modern times and the pressing need for "reform."[111] Fellow Kyoto School thinker Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962), in his *Philosophy as Metanoetics* (*Zangedō toshite no tetsugaku*, 1946), provided an extended and highly personal reflection on what may have gone wrong with Buddhism and Japanese culture in the modern era. In 1958, Watanabe Shōkō (1907–1977) wrote of "distorted views and a despicable professionalism," and of "'high priests' (*kōsō*) who, although they professed expressly good intentions, asserted absurd ideas because a fundamental knowledge of Buddhism was lacking."[112] Watanabe's anger was directed not solely or even primarily at wartime collaborators but upon those whose seemingly

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[108] "What is the icchantika? The icchantika cuts off all roots of good deeds and the mind does not call forth any association of good. Not even a bit of thought of good comes about. Anything like this never comes about in true emancipation" (NS, p. 120).

[109] See Matsumoto Shirō, *Engi to kū: Nyoraizō shisō hihan* (Tokyo, 1989); Steven Heine, "The Role of Repentance—or lack of it—in Zen Monasticism." (Online, 2002). Available at: www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/role%20of%20repentence%20in%20zen.pdf [accessed November 14, 2010].

[110] See DDB, s.v. "icchantika."

[111] See Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, pp. 254–5.

[112] Watanabe Shōkō, *Japanese Buddhism: A Critical Appraisal* (Tokyo, 1964 [1958]), pp. 1–2.

good intentions helped pave the road to Hades—or, to properly contextualize the metaphor, to Nanking. Moreover, Watanabe proclaimed, "[I]f we do not make these points clear, we cannot grasp the essential nature of Japanese Buddhism." Not unlike his more recent critical heirs, Matsumoto and Hakayama, Watanabe was determined to expose both the good and bad of Japanese Buddhism, while clearly acknowledging that he knew which was which. Unlike Critical Buddhism, however, Watanabe insisted, in a more Weberian spirit, that his task was ultimately "objective."[113]

Understanding the historical context is of course crucial for any sustained reflection upon the issue of Buddhism and violence or social discrimination. Yet a reductionist contextualization can itself lead to hasty and often unwarranted conclusions. Robert Sharf, one of the more astute and critical contemporary scholars of Asian Buddhism, argues that modern Zen as developed in the various writings of Zen-influenced philosophers like Nishida and Suzuki came to be conceived as a "mystical or spiritual gnosis that transcends sectarian boundaries."[114] Such an understanding of Zen, Sharf argues, is quite distinct from anything preceding the Meiji period, and vastly different from what goes on in the Zen monastery to this day. Stuart Lachs makes the same point, suggesting that Suzuki in particular "promoted a non-traditional, modernist interpretation of Zen" by emphasizing a Zen "freed from its Mahayana Buddhist context, centered on a special kind of 'pure' experience and without the traditional Buddhist concern for morality."[115] This view, according to Lachs, was taken up by the Kyoto School in an attempt to accentuate the aspects of Buddhism "that are both most different from Western traditions and most distinctively Japanese"[116]—an ironic twist, given that it is largely the modernist element of such an interpretation of Zen that has attracted so many Western Buddhists of the past several generations.

Yet, while it is important to recognize with Sharf and Lachs the transformations that have shaped twentieth-century "modernist" Zen, and the influence of Western philosophy on those changes, their thesis of Buddhist "decline" has the corollary danger of suggesting that the modern lapses of Zen social ethics are historically anomalous—specific to a particular period of restlessness, cultural and spiritual anxiety, Westernization/anti-Westernization, and insurgent Japanese nationalism. Other commentators have made this suggestion even more strongly, with less nuance than Sharf or Lachs. In such a scenario, Zen becomes exempt from association with modern militarism not because it was blatantly misused, but because Zen itself had become corrupted by modern circumstances—including the pernicious effect of Western philosophy.

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113 Ibid., pp. 3–4.

114 Sharf, "Whose Zen?" p. 43.

115 Stuart Lachs, "Coming Down from the Zen Clouds: A Critique of the Current State of American Zen." (Online, 1994). Available at: www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/ComingDownfromtheZenClouds.htm [accessed November 14, 2010], p. 1.

116 Ibid.

Brian Victoria, author of *Zen at War* (1997) and *Zen War Stories* (2003), is wary of such an interpretation of Zen militarism. He makes it quite clear that the development of Zen from the Meiji Restoration in 1868 up to the end of the Pacific War in 1945, while not entirely representative of the historical relationship between Zen and warfare, was also not entirely unique. "[T]he unity of Zen and the sword," he claims, "has deep roots in Zen Buddhist doctrine and history."[117] Moreover:

> Questions related to the use of Buddhist doctrine to console both the living and the dead in wartime Japan cannot be dismissed as nothing more than a momentary aberration within the Buddhist tradition. If indeed Buddhist doctrine … was "twisted," then that twisting is but one of many such examples in Buddhist history and remains as alive today as it was more than a thousand years ago. To deny this is to deny the unsettling reality that Buddhism, like other of the world's religions, has often justified, if not encouraged, the slaughter of human beings.[118]

Yet, despite this caution, Victoria does not explore this issue beyond the modern period; more significantly, he fails to fully address the issue of the use or misuse of Buddhist doctrine in the promotion of warfare. Indeed, despite the many historical cases and incidents cited by Victoria, his work is limited, as he is quick to point out in the introduction to *Zen at War*, by the fact that he is a historian, not an ethicist, a philosopher, or a religious critic. Thus, while the tone of the book expresses an undisguised evaluation of Buddhist betrayal—or, as the author would have it, "emasculation"—of the Buddhadharma, Victoria is not willing to pursue just what this means in terms of Zen or Buddhism today. Clearly, he has taken sides on the issue, and his pacifist leanings are most evident. Yet, for all this he never actually states his own assumptions or biases; he never says why it is that the misuse of Zen or Buddhism is, in fact, a "misuse" at all—leaving this for the reader to determine, or simply assume with the author the moral high ground. In his more recent publication, *Zen War Stories* (2003), Victoria stands by his "moralistic" approach by suggesting, quite correctly, "Buddhism has been, from its inception more than 2,500 years ago, a profoundly moral religion, with no more important precept than abstention from taking life."[119] Yet just a few pages later he laments "Zen's long-standing and self-serving lack of interest in, or commitment to, Buddhism's ethical precepts."[120] That is to say, the question of "what," though very much connected to the question of "how," stops short of a full exploration of "why." *Why* did these

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117 Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. 11; see also Winston King, *Zen and the Way of the Sword* (Oxford, 1994).

118 Victoria, *Zen War Stories*, p. 162.

119 Ibid., p. xiv.

120 Ibid., p. 16.

things come about? *Why* was Buddhism so easily manipulated to suit Japanese militarism? Moreover, and most importantly, *what is to be done*?[121]

In the postwar years, several prominent Japanese scholars of Buddhism have attempted to deal with some of the deeper issues at stake here. Hisamatsu Shin'ichi (1889–1980), a student of Nishida Kitarō at Kyoto University and later Professor at Kyoto and Hanazono universities, was an outspoken critic of what he saw as Zen's ethical and political weaknesses. From early on in his career, Hisamatsu criticized Zen for what he saw as its undue emphasis on monasticism and *satori*, and its corresponding neglect of real-world problems, making Hisamatsu in many ways an early prophet of Engaged Buddhism. Hisamatsu's ideas for reform centered on the practice of "great compassion" (Sk. *mahākaruṇā*), which he felt had to be the central driving motif for Zen as for other Buddhist streams. He frequently cites the priorities of the Fourfold Great Vow (*shigu seigan*), where the primary vow is to "save all sentient beings," and only thereafter comes the more individualistic vow to "extinguish the passions." However, rather than look at compassion as leading others to awakening, Hisamatsu felt that compassion had to mean the elimination of suffering at the earthly and not simply the existential or soteriological level. If this were not the case, that is, if Zen compassion continued to ignore "the world and history," in the end we will be left with "a forest Buddhism, temple Buddhism, at best, a Zen-monastery Buddhism," or, we might add, given the primary function of Japanese Buddhism today, a "funerary Buddhism."[122]

In the late 1940s, Hisamatsu founded a group called Gakudō Dōjō (Place for Study and Practice of the Way), which emphasized the oneness of scholarship and religious practice.[123] In 1958 the group became the F.A.S. society, adopting the following basic principles:

1. Awakening to the Formless Self (the "depth" dimension);
2. Standing on the Standpoint of All Humankind (the "width" dimension); and
3. Creating History Supra-Historically (the "length" dimension).[124]

Hisamatsu sought, as all good prophets, to bring Zen back to earth, which involved establishing a "Zen for all people" (*taishūzen*). There is a forthright admission here—unlike in the work of, say, D.T. Suzuki—that in postwar Japanese society Zen had become irrelevant to the lives, if not the deaths, of the vast majority of Japanese people. As with Critical Buddhism, Hisamatsu's reformation of Zen is

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121 Some of these "lingering questions" have been explored more recently by Christopher Ives in his *Imperial-Way Zen*, via a critique of Ichikawa Hakugen.

122 See Christopher Ives, *Zen Awakening and Society* (London, 1992), p. 68.

123 Abe Masao, "A History of the FAS Society." (Online, 1996). Available at: www.fas.x0.com/writings/fasj/fj96fashistory1e.html [accessed November 14, 2010], p. 3.

124 Ives, *Zen Awakening*, p. 72; see also Abe Masao, "Hisamatsu's Philosophy of Awakening," *The Eastern Buddhist, New Series*, 14/1 (1981): pp. 26–42.

not simply about acting better, but includes a distinctively critical component that connects it with the practice of scholarship itself. To replace traditional forms of Zen practice or *sanzen*, Hisamatsu created something called *sōgo sankyū*: "mutual inquiry." According to Hisamatsu, "True practitioners of Zen must study such areas as politics, economics, history and the natural sciences in order to understand more fully the issues facing humanity and to work out skillful means (*upāya*) in responding to them."[125]

Yet, for all his privileging of the ethical and social dimensions of Zen, Hisamatsu, as with his Kyoto School peers, ultimately manages to turn history and politics into abstract categories bereft of substance.[126] Indeed, one could say that, in the end, Hisamatsu gets trapped in the entrance to what he had himself called the "ghostly cave," since it appears that in his scheme only upon the mass awakening of individuals will our real-world problems of suffering and injustice be solved. This counters the Engaged Buddhist notion that ethical-political activity and engagement is either prior to, or inexorably related to, awakening itself and not its inevitable fruit.

Besides Hisamatsu, the clearest attempt by a postwar Japanese scholar to shed light on these matters is that of Ichikawa Hakugen (1902–1986), in works such as *Zen to gendai shisō* (Zen and Contemporary Thought, 1967) and *Bukkyōsha no sensō sekinin* (The War Responsibility of Buddhists, 1970). Himself a repentant nationalist, Ichikawa may have been the first to draw explicit connections between specific Zen ideas and what he saw were problematic ethical-political activities or passivity in the face of injustice. On one level, Ichikawa's critique was leveled against the harmonization (*wagō*) of Zen with Shinto and other streams of Japanese culture, a merger which, he felt, assimilated Zen into the modern socio-political structure and thus effectively destroyed its critical capacities. Ichikawa also was concerned to develop the notion of freedom within Zen—especially the contrast between what he refers to as "secular" or horizontal and "desecularized" or vertical freedom.[127]

Finally, Critical Buddhists Hakamaya and Matsumoto, extending the work of Ichikawa, are much more willing than either Watanabe, Hisamatsu, Sharf, or Victoria to pronounce upon doctrines, ideas, schools, and sects that they declare not only problematic or distorted, but decidedly "non-Buddhist." The goals of the Critical Buddhists are more encompassing than those of previous writers who have criticized Japanese Buddhist leaders and thinkers before, during, and after the Asia Pacific War. Their objective is not simply to expose the particular problems of the past but to pave the way for a better future for Buddhism on the world stage.

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[125] Quoted in Ives, *Zen Awakening*, p. 71.

[126] See Ives (*Zen Awakening*, pp. 82–3) for a critique of Hisamatsu's lapses into tautology, especially with regard to the term "postmodern."

[127] Ichikawa, *Bukkyōsha*; see also Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen*; Hirata Seikō, "Zen Buddhist Attitudes to War," in James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo (eds), *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu, 1994), p. 11.

Thus, while the motivation and instigation for Critical Buddhism emerged out of the context of contemporary Japanese political culture, the focus of their research and ultimate conclusions is situated more squarely within (Japanese) Buddhist tradition, particularly Buddhist metaphysics and ethics. Critical Buddhism works with this precarious balance between history and philosophy: between the manifest realities of the present and recent past, on one hand, and long-standing cultural motifs and doctrines from earlier times, on the other. In order to comprehend the wide front from which Critical Buddhism makes war upon certain ideas and tendencies within Buddhist and Zen traditions, it is necessary to examine the specific philosophical and doctrinal debates in further detail. In this chapter, my task has been to provide some historical and political background and context for the philosophical analysis to follow.

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Chapter 2
The Roots of "Topicalism"

> One problem that the [Zen] tradition has not faced is a pronounced tendency not to recognize Zen doctrine *as* doctrine. Perhaps due to the influence of the "no dependence" slogan, Zen Buddhists have tended to assume that traditional pronouncements about "the Way" are something other than doctrine, and therefore not susceptible to critical thought. As long as ideas are naively thought to "flow directly from experience" (or, in other traditions, directly from God), they will be held dogmatically. Although unreflective Zen is certainly possible, it is not desirable, and constitutes a self-imposed limitation that has, on occasion, weakened the tradition. In much of the tradition, of course, this has not occurred. Creative minds, deeply immersed in both "one mind" and "everyday mind," have transmitted a tradition to us that is in some sense unparalleled in its reflective and conceptual capacities.
>
> Dale Wright, *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism*, p. 179

Underlying all of the specific targets of the Critical Buddhists lies a more pervasive, fundamental source: *topicalism*—for which Matsumoto employs a Sanskrit neologism, *dhātu-vāda*—a mode of understanding, expressing and living religiously in terms of (silent) mysticism and appeals to harmony and unity at the expense of (vocal) discrimination, logic, and criticism. This is in turn based on a assumption of *topos* as a singular place or locus which gives rise to a plurality of phenomena. In order to flesh out the meaning of topicalism, a more extensive analysis of Critical Buddhism with respect to the issue of religious syncretism, the doctrines of Buddha-nature and original enlightenment, and Nishida's conception of "pure experience" (*junsui keiken*) is necessary. This in turn leads us to an alternative understanding of *topos*—one which, I shall argue, better serves the purposes and goals of Critical Buddhism hermeneutics and praxis, and helps to clarify the more positive proposals extending from a counter-reading of *critica vis-à-vis* classical Buddhist doctrines of emptiness (*kū*), impermanence (*mujō*) and *pratītya-samutpāda* (*engi*).

The main reason for Hakamaya and Matsumoto's disdain for topicalism, whether Buddhist or otherwise, stems from their suspicion of an inherent and inevitable link between a philosophy or religious system based on a foundational "locus" and socio-political ideologies of discrimination, exclusion and authoritarianism. This attitude is aptly summarized in the following remarks by Hakayama:

> Apart from a few anonymous monks who shared the sufferings of the people, Buddhism at the time [i.e., the eighteenth century]—and all the way up to today—took the doctrine of original enlightenment as its foundation and from there encouraged people to accept their karma, giving "all sorts of reasons as to

> why such intense sorrow need not bring them to grief." The sermons of the Sōtō preachers on the *Shusōhgi*, expounding their "knowledge" of the principle of cause and effect, thus led to a complete indifference towards "others" and in this way supported oppressive controls over them.[1]

While their criticism on this matter is directed mainly at Japanese religious leaders in the modern period, the connection can certainly be extended more broadly. Though the cross-cultural implications of topicalism are not spelled out in detail, Hakamaya and Matsumoto assume a universality to the conflict between *topica* and *critica*—a point that, for Jacqueline Stone, leads to the most glaring weaknesses of Critical Buddhism.[2] However, in their favor, it could be argued that such universalization should be understood as a broad heuristic employed *mutatis mutandis*, and need not be assumed to apply everywhere and in all cases in the same way. Indeed, modern nationalism and militarism, wherever they exist, often rely on ideologies that emphasize what might be called "transcendent immanence," or—in Stone's words—"the sacralization of the status quo." "Suffice it here to say that a recurring thread in authoritarian and conservative ideologies over the last 400 years lies in an appeal to an all-encompassing or immanental ground, said to be manifested in the state, in social relations, or in one's given circumstances."[3] When looking to the work of twentieth-century Western scholars and writers who have studied and felt a certain affinity for the East, this link is disturbingly evident, though varied in manifestation.[4] J.J. Clarke, after noting the anti-Semitic and quasi-fascist utterances to which numerous orientalists (e.g., Tucci) and orientophilic literary modernists (e.g., Pound, Yeats, Eliot) were prone, asks whether this connection is "entirely coincidental or adventitious." For Tucci, "the spiritual riches and psychological integrity" of the East were contrasted with "the artificial, rootless, and fragmented life of modern Europe." Tucci called for a more authentic existence and revealed a deep antagonism toward industrialization, urbanization, and—here he strays from more utopian Romantic visions—liberal democracy. As Clarke notes, these elements were "a means for coming to terms with modernity that echoed the fundamental agenda of fascist ideology"—both Japanese and European.[5]

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[1] Hakamaya Noriaki, "Thoughts on the Ideological Background of Social Discrimination," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 354.

[2] Jacqueline Stone, "Review Article: Some Reflections on Critical Buddhism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 26/1–2 (1999): pp. 181–2.

[3] Stone, "Some Reflections," p. 182; see also Tamura Yoshirō, *Kamakura shin bukkyō shisō no kenkyū* (Kyoto, 1965), pp. 467–9; Shimaji Daitō, "Chūko Tendai no gakugo toshite mitaru hongaku no gainen," in *Kyōri to shiron* (Tokyo, 1933), p. 473.

[4] See J.J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought* (London, 1997), p. 199; Vickie Mackenzie, *Why Buddhism? Westerners in Search of Wisdom* (London, 2001), p. 146.

[5] Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, p. 196; see also Donald Lopez (ed.), *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism* (Chicago, 1995), p. 182.

Taking our cue from the earliest Romantic period, we might conjecture that the connection lay not so much in a direct or logical connection between orientalist and fascist attitudes, but rather in the fact that in both cases a robust assault had been mounted on certain established Western ideas and traditions.[6]

Indeed, from the beginning of European Romanticism, a deep skepticism and harsh criticism of the Enlightenment paradigm took flight, only to find itself gliding, often unawares, into the dark night of full-fledged anti-rationalist ideologies like Nazism and fascism. At the same time, Clarke's answer still evades an important issue: namely, what are the more specific points of contact between orientalist, Romantic, and fascist worldviews, and what does it mean to suggest that the connections are not merely coincidental or adventitious? These questions reflect significantly upon accusations by Critical Buddhists and others of Buddhist complicity with militarism and totalitarian regimes.

On one level, then, the critique of topicalism, and subsequent dismissal of Vico and his legacy, can be understood as a rejection of the perceived "irrationalism" that beset Japan from late Meiji through early Shōwa, and which, in the eyes of Critical Buddhism, has not entirely disappeared from postwar Japan. In this context, it is understandable that Hakamaya and Matsumoto would be wary of the West's seeming turn away from the spirit of the rationalist European Enlightenment towards "postmodernism," as well as the enthusiastic adoption of such among Japanese scholars, who occasionally employ postmodern theory in service of a revived form of Japanism. But the concerns of Critical Buddhism are by no means limited to a critique of wartime militarism or orientalism. These are offshoots, they argue, of a deeper problem within Buddhism, rooted in some of the fundamental doctrines, movements, and self-understandings within Buddhism tradition.

Besides the impact of relatively self-contained modern ideologies such as *bushidō* and *Nihonshugi*, we must note the complex role of religious syncretism on the historical development of Buddhism in Japan. Buddhism is of course a foreign religion to Japan, but the transplant has been so thoroughly intertwined with its cultural hosts that it is extremely difficult at times to distinguish them, let alone tear them apart. Moreover, by the time it "officially" reached the island of Kyushu by way of the Korean peninsula around 550 CE, Buddhism had already been transformed considerably by translation from Pali and Sanskrit into Chinese and Korean languages and cultures. It is thus impossible to isolate an originary Buddhism separate from cultural "distortions." Watanabe Shōko, perhaps overreacting to the Japanese tradition of understanding their own particular transmission as the true culmination of the teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha, makes the bold claim that "the greater part of the Japanese, instead of arriving at an objective apprehension of foreign [i.e., Chinese and Indian] culture as such, desired more to select (from foreign culture), according to a subjective

6 Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, p. 194.

standard, only what was convenient for them."[7] This is undoubtedly harsh, but it does point to the dilemma of being a "culture of assimilation." Particularly pertinent here is Watanabe's assertion that "we"—that is, scholars and/or self-reflective moderns—"cannot say at all that Japanese Buddhism, which has been transformed by misunderstanding and insufficient knowledge, is the essence of Buddhism."[8] There is, for Watanabe, something called "Buddhism" as a whole, the multiform tradition that contains both good and bad, better and worse; and then there is real or true Buddhism—which has an *essence*, and one that is presumably "good." We must ask, however: even if it were possible to resurrect such an originary Buddhism, would it have any relevance to the contemporary world, or would it be virtually unintelligible? For instance, it seems clear that a significant transformation occurred as early as the switch from Pali to Sanskrit as the official language for Buddhist expression. Indeed, those writers who continue to make appeals to originary Buddhism are ironically more often than not calling for a return to a form of Buddhism no doubt already transfigured from its original forms.[9]

Much of the blame for the recurrence, and in their eyes, ultimate hegemony, of topicalism in the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition is placed by Hakamaya and Matsumoto on religio-cultural intermingling and syncretism, often connected to a penchant in both Chinese and Japanese (and to a lesser extent, Indian) cultures for preaching the virtues of "tolerance" and "harmony" among religious paths. The argument here cannot be that borrowing is in itself defiling (after all, Critical Buddhism clearly borrows from Western philosophy and Enlightenment liberal humanism), but rather that elements foreign to the standard of *criticism*—e.g., Chinese *dao*;[10] Shinto *wa*;[11] Viconian *topos* (Jp. *basho*);[12] Nishidan "pure

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7 Watanabe Shōkō, *Japanese Buddhism: A Critical Appraisal* (Tokyo, 1964), p. 13.

8 Ibid.

9 In a review of James Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (London, 2001), Peter Gregory takes the author to task for his originalist presumptions (Peter Gregory, "Review of *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* by James Coleman," *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, 10/3 [2001]: p. 108). In his classic work on *Zen and American Thought* (London, 1978 [1960]), Van Meter Ames makes similar originalist assumptions with regard to Zen (p. 5).

10 See Hakamaya, *Hihan bukkyō* (Tokyo, 1990), pp. 25–35; Jamie Hubbard, "Topophobia," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), pp. 82, 92–5, 110.

11 See Hakamaya, *Hihan bukkyō*, pp. 110, 118; Matsumoto Shirō, *Engi to kū: Nyoraizō shisō hihan* [*Pratītya-samutpāda* and emptiness: Critiques of the doctrine of *tathāgata-garbha*] (Tokyo, 1989), p. 102; Paul L. Swanson, "Why They Say Zen Is Not Buddhism: Recent Japanese Critiques of Buddha-Nature," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), pp. 16–19.

12 See Hakamaya, *Hihan bukkyō*, pp. 3–46; Swanson, "Why They Say Zen," pp. 13, 15; Hubbard, "Topophobia," pp. 81–112.

experience" (*junsui keiken*);[13] Weberian "objectivity";[14] German Idealism;[15] "postmodern relativism"[16]—have all worked in various ways to render much of Japanese Buddhism, along with modern Japanese thought in general, non- or anti-Buddhist.

An indisputable fact of history is that the importation of any religion into a new cultural matrix will—if the new religion is to succeed (i.e., gain adherents) at all—produce a certain amount of syncretism. The specific implications of such intermingling on ritual as well as doctrinal levels is notoriously difficult to ascertain. While originalists tend to argue that there is a pure essence which can usually be located in the historical origins of a tradition (e.g., the "Jesus movement," the Medina community, or the early *sangha*), other religious conservatives, often those of a more patriotic strain, will make the case that the merger of traditions actually helped to illuminate the true intentions of the founder. This latter argument is quite common in Japanese Buddhist writing. After all, Buddhist apologists cannot help but acknowledge the vast cultural differences between Śākyamuni's India and Japan (at any time). Yet rather than lament this incongruity, it is more often celebrated as necessary, fortuitous, even preordained fulfillment or "flowering" of the true Dharma.

Let us look more closely at the influence of the major East Asian religious and philosophical traditions on Japanese Buddhism, beginning with Chinese Daoism (Jp. *dōkyō*). The tendency to conflate Daoist and Buddhist ideas is prevalent in modern Western writings on Buddhism; the writings of Alan Watts, father of "Beat Zen," are perhaps the prototype here. This tendency is not simply a product of confusion on the part of modern Western popularizers; it is an undeniable aspect of the history of Mahāyāna Buddhism as it grew and developed in China and Korea and from there entered Japan. It has been claimed that Rinzai in the ninth century made the Buddhadharma almost synonymous with the "Way" (Jp. *dō*) of the *Daodejing*.[17] Whatever the case, it is no scholarly secret that Chinese Buddhism—Chan/Zen in particular—absorbed much of the language and concepts of the Daoist philosophical tradition. Ichikawa Hakugen, in his analysis of the socio-ethical lapses of Japanese Zen, looks to the historical context of the development of Chan in fifth- and sixth-century China as a force for cohesion in a period of great turmoil in that country. Over the centuries, Chan absorbed and adopted

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[13] See Hakamaya, *Hihan bukkyō*, pp. 71–86.

[14] Ibid., pp. 95–7; see also Matsumoto, *Engi to kū*, pp. 99–100.

[15] See Hakamaya, *Hihan bukkyō*, pp. 128–9; Hakamaya Noriaki, "Scholarship as Criticism," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), pp. 134–5; Lin Chen-kuo, "Metaphysics, Suffering, and Liberation: The Debate Between Two Buddhisms," in Janie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), pp. 301–2, 305–6.

[16] See Hakamaya, *Hihan bukkyō*, pp. 127–8.

[17] See Jon Carter Covell, *Ikkyū's Red Thread* (Seoul, 1981), p. 58.

fundamental notions of harmony, non-contention, and non-discrimination from Daoism. These elements of Daoist thought are best summed up in Chapter 8 of the *Daodejing*:

> The best of man is like water,
> Which benefits all things, and does not contend with them,
> Which flows in places that others disdain,
> Where it is in harmony with the Way.
> So the sage:
> Lives within nature,
> Thinks within the deep,
> Gives within impartiality,
> Speaks within trust,
> Governs within order,
> Crafts within ability,
> Acts within opportunity.
> He does not contend, and none contend against him.[18]

As such, Ichikawa argues, the Zen awakening or *satori* experience, inflected with Chinese Daoist principles of adaptability, emerges as little more than a "peaceful" affirmation of the status quo—bereft of any need for change or criticism.[19] In short, in Ichikawa's analysis, Chan/Zen becomes a search for "peace of mind" (Ch. *anxin*; Jp. *anshin*). In support of Ichikawa's claims, the fourteenth-century *Tsurezuregusa* of Zen Buddhist priest Yoshida Kenkō (1283–1350) expresses a clear Daoist sentiment of "nothingness" (*mu*)—as opposed to the more strictly Buddhist "emptiness" (*kū*)[20]—with frequent reference to Daoist sage Zhuangzi (Jp. Sōji, c.369–286 BCE):

> True knowledge is not what one hears from others or acquires through study. What, then, are we to call knowledge? Proper and improper come to one and the same thing—can we call anything "good"? The truly enlightened man has no learning, no virtue, no accomplishments, no fame. Who knows of him, who will report his glory? It is not that he conceals his virtue or pretends to be stupid; it is because from the outset he is above distinctions between wise and foolish, between profit

18 Peter Merel (tr.), *The GNL Tao te Ching*. (Online, 1995). Available at: www.chinapage.com/gnl.html [accessed November 14, 2010], p. 8.

19 See Christopher Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen: Ichikawa Hakugen's Critique and Lingering Questions for Buddhist Ethics* (Honolulu, 2009), pp. 60–68.

20 Charles Muller describes *mu* as "the 'original non-being' from which being is produced in the *Tao Te Ching*. This meaning is explained in Buddhism when making the distinction between it and the Buddhist emptiness." Yet, "[i]n the Zen (Chan) sect, the word *mu* is called the gate to enlightenment (see *Wumenguan* [Jp. *Mumonkan*], Case 1)" (DDB, s.v. "emptiness").

> and loss. If, in your delusion, you seek fame and profit, the results will be as I have described. All is unreality. Nothing is worth discussing, worth desiring.[21]

Ichikawa places much emphasis on the effect of the concept of harmony (*wa* or *wagō*), which incorporates Daoist-inspired ideas of nonresistance and tolerance. The general notion of harmony has become something of a benchmark of all things Japanese. One popular English-language book on Japan—specifically, on foreign baseball players trying to adjust to Japanese culture—is called *You Gotta Have Wa* (1990). Again, as overt political ideology this can be traced back to the Seventeen Article Constitution of Shōtoku Taishi (604 CE), which opens as follows: "Above all esteem concord; make it your first duty to avoid discord." Some scholars suggest that *wa* was adopted less from Daoism than from Chinese Confucian tradition, but changed in meaning from the *Analects*' (Ch. *Lunyu*; Jp. *Rongo*) sense of "benevolence" to the more specifically Japanese "decorum" or "propriety."[22] The problem, says Ichikawa, is that these ideas, if taken by themselves, become easy prey to ideological manipulation and submission to authority. In a climate of authoritarian control, Buddhists or others who adopt harmony as a guiding ethic commit themselves to upholding the status quo, whatever such may be. This is evident in the Buddhist criticism of Christians and socialists who attempted in various ways to oppose the state from the time of the Imperial Rescript through the late 1930s:

> With what has modern Japanese Buddhism harmonized itself? With State Shintō. With state power and authority. With militarism. Accordingly, with war. To what has modern Japanese Buddhism been nonresistant? To State Shintō. To state power and authority. To militarism. To wars of invasion. To what has modern Japanese Buddhism been tolerant? Towards those with whom it harmonizes. Towards personal responsibility for the war.[23]

Although Ichikawa's arguments are persuasive, the interpretation of Buddhism's precise role in Chinese history *vis-à-vis* Daoism and the notion of harmony could lead in other directions. According to one tradition, Buddhism was introduced into China by the Han Dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE) Emperor Mingdi (r. 57–75 CE), who sent a mission to what is now Afghanistan to investigate this religion in 68 CE. In the decades that followed, Buddhism was generally unopposed by the pre-existent Daoism and Confucianism but had little influence on Chinese culture and society until the Han empire weakened, decentralized, and fell into disorder late in the second century CE, instigating a period of roughly four centuries of chaos and turmoil. Eventually, nomadic invaders from the north, the Xianbei (Jp. *Senpi*),

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21 *Tsurezuregusa*, 41; see *Zhuangzi*, especially the section entitled "Levelling All Things."

22 Kishimoto Hideo, "Some Japanese Cultural Traits and Religions," in Charles A. Moore (ed.), *The Japanese Mind* (Honolulu, 1982), p. 145.

23 Christopher Ives, *Zen Awakening and Society* (London, 1992), p. 90.

overran the northern provinces and founded the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534). They patronized Buddhism to counter the Confucian social ethic that had provided the social foundation of the disintegrating Han empire. Buddhism flourished during this period of turmoil, no doubt in part because the concept of individual salvation became attractive as the rigid structures of the Confucian ethic floundered. In other words, while state patronage certainly played a role in Buddhism's success in China, as Ichikawa argues, a case could be made that, rather than unify single-minded support for the political rulers, Buddhism was adopted here precisely because it *did not* support the social structures and political framework of the traditional elites, but rather represented change and the possibility of individual liberation (if not always in a direct political sense).

The importance of Confucian contributions to Japanese social ethics can hardly be overstated. Though it is surely too much to say, with Kishimoto Hideo, that Confucianism (Jp. *jukyō*) is the *sole* source of Japanese moral relations,[24] it is clear that this ancient philosophico-religious tradition, which entered Japan a number of times in various forms, is the primary source of a number of the most significant Japanese moral and ethical norms, from Shōtoku's *Jūshichijō kenpō* to the *Kokutai no hongi*.[25] Of course, certain Confucian ideals were conveniently emended or erased to suit prevailing Japanese political needs. For instance, in classical Confucianism the legitimacy of a ruler or dynasty depends upon something ultimately above and beyond him: the so-called Mandate of Heaven (Ch. *tianming*; Jp. *tenmei*). A change in dynasties signaled that the ruler had, for lack of virtue, lost this mandate. The concept was apparently first used by members of what would become the Western Zhou Dynasty (c.1046–770 BCE) to justify their overthrow of the Shang or Yin Dynasty (c.1600–1046 BCE) and thereafter by many succeeding dynasties. One consequence of the notion of the Mandate of Heaven was that it was not necessary for a person to be of noble birth to lead a revolt and become a legitimate ruler. We see the historical effects of this doctrine in the fact that both the Han and Ming (1368–c.1644) dynasties were founded by persons of modest birth. Whatever its Chinese roots, this element became, in the eyes of the Japanese elite, a dangerous precedent for revolution. Moreover, though Confucianism in China went through many phases, during which it was, at times, as much a fully-fledged "religion" (i.e., source of ritual and devotion) as Daoism or Buddhism, the impact of Confucianism on Japan was almost entirely in terms of ethics and social norms, and this influence was mainly rationalistic in flavor.[26]

Finally, it is important to note Japanese Confucianism was in fact largely Neo-Confucianism—itself the product of several centuries of development in

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24 Kishimoto, "Some Japanese Traits," p. 116.

25 See Hori Ichirō et al. (eds), *Japanese Religion: A Survey by the Agency for Cultural Affairs* (New York, 1972), pp. 23, 105.

26 Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Values of Pre-Industrial Japan* (Glencoe, 1957), p. 69.

China. Neo-Confucianism (Ch. *lixue* or *daoxue*; Jp. *shushigaku*), a form of Confucianism developed mainly during the Song Dynasty (960–1279), was a response by Confucian scholars to the dominance of Daoists and Buddhists. Neo-Confucians such as Zhuxi (Jp. Shuki, 1130–1200) recognized that the Confucian system lacked a thoroughgoing metaphysics, and thus set out to devise one by adopting liberally from both rival traditions as well as the traditional Confucian teachings. A well-known Neo-Confucian motif is found in paintings of Confucius, Buddha, and the legendary Laozi all drinking out of the same vinegar jar, often accompanied with the slogan "The three teachings are one!" (Jp. *sankyō gōitsu*). While Neo-Confucianism incorporated Buddhist and Daoist ideas, many Neo-Confucians claimed to strongly oppose Buddhism and Daoism, frequently on rationalist grounds. One of Hanyu's (Jp. *Kanyu*, 768–824) most famous essays—which ultimately got him banished from the Imperial court—decries the worship of Buddhist relics, and Zhuxi wrote a number of essays denouncing the errors of Buddhism and Daoism. Though the importation of Neo-Confucianism as a coherent set of ideas and generalized philosophy began full-scale only in the Edo period, for several centuries it had been seeping into Japanese culture from China and Korea. Indeed, as early as the thirteenth-century Neo-Confucian ideas had infiltrated Japan by way of Song Dynasty Chan ideas which were enthusiastically promoted by Zen teachers as beneficial to the developing samurai ethic.[27] Thus, ironically, Neo-Confucianism in Japan was promoted under Buddhist auspices, while it had arisen in China as precisely the opposite—as a revolt against Buddhist-Daoist incursions into classical Confucianism. On the whole, the rise of Neo-Confucianism in China went hand-in-hand with the decline of the influence of Buddhism and Daoism, due less to rejection than to absorption.

Not everyone was in favor of importing Neo-Confucian ideals, however. Critical Buddhist hero Dōgen, for one, fulminated against the trend of Zen/Confucian accommodation as a dangerous aberration,[28] and indeed, many shoguns within the Tokugawa regime agreed with Dōgen that the two (or three?) traditions should remain separate. Contrary to the Sōtō sect founder, however, many Edo period warlords favored the development of Confucianism over Buddhism. While Buddhism, they felt, was unnecessarily otherworldly and spiritual, Confucianism was perceived as being humanistic, rational, and focused on socio-political concerns—thus more applicable to the running of a modern state. For instance, Hayashi Razan (1583–1687), a follower of Zhuxi, vociferously opposed Buddhism as being "otherworldly, transcendental, irrational, nonempirical, and foreign to Japanese traditions."[29] At any rate, the emergence of Japanese Neo-Confucianism

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27 See Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion*, pp. 54–5; also Gene H. Blocker and Christopher L. Starling, *Japanese Philosophy* (Albany, 2001), pp. 93–4, for a different perspective.

28 Thomas Cleary, *Rational Zen: The Mind of Dōgen Zenji* (Boston and London, 1993), pp. 35–6.

29 Blocker and Starling, *Japanese Philosophy*, p. 79.

served to bolster the rule of the shogunate[30] and led to what one scholar has referred to as an explosion among all classes of "conventional morality" (*tsūzoku dōtoku*), which emphasized "self-cultivation through the practice of diligence, frugality and harmony," and was rooted in a vague but influential "philosophy of mind [or spirit]" (*kokoro no tetsugaku*).[31] Here the term *kokoro*—mind, heart, or spirit—was taken to mean the universal immanent ground that serves as a locus for the identification of self, society, and nature.[32] These developments of the Edo period, sponsored in large part by the emerging state for purposes of order and control, are a crucial link in the chain of causality leading to what Critical Buddhism regards as modern Japanese topicalism, i.e., as a significant contributing factor in twentieth-century Imperial Way ideology.[33] However, analysis of the development of Edo-period ideology plays only a minimal role in the explicit narrative of Critical Buddhism. This is a serious lacuna.

While Hakamaya and Matsumoto are more forgiving than Dōgen on the negative impact of Confucian tradition—indeed, at times they appear to uphold it as an ideal for Buddhism!—their critical forebear Ichikawa Hakugen notes the virtue of loyalty (Ch. *zhong*; Jp. *chū* or *chūsei*) as a distinctively Confucian element that seeped into modern Japanese consciousness, such that it became, for a number of reasons, more central than it ever had been in China.[34] Ichikawa argues that this became especially problematic with the emergence of modern nationalism and imperialism in the late Meiji era.

Finally, we should note the work of Chinese philosopher and essayist (and student of John Dewey) Hu Shih (1891–1963). Hu, a contemporary of Ichikawa, developed a similar argument to Ichikawa—i.e., that most forms of Chinese Buddhism, Chan in particular, are actually "anti-Buddhistic." Yet, in opposition to both Ichikawa and the Critical Buddhists, Hu sees this change as a boon, in that it "simplified" and "naturalized" Buddhism, turning it away from the metaphysical abstractions and other-worldliness of the Indian traditions. Moreover, Hu criticizes D.T. Suzuki in particular for missing these Sinitic gains and sliding backwards into a morass of illogic and irrationality.[35]

If Buddhism in China was affected by Daoist and Confucian ideas, Buddhism in Japan, from its inception in the mid-sixth century, was faced with

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30 See Herman Ooms, *Tokugawa Ideology: Early Constructs, 1500–1680* (Princeton, 1985).

31 Yasumaru Yoshio, *Nihon no kindaika to minshū shisō* (Tokyo, 1974).

32 Stone, "Some Reflections," p. 179.

33 Ibid., p. 181.

34 See L. 14.7; also Ives, *Zen Awakening*, p. 92 n.97; Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion*, p. 55.

35 See Hu Shih, "Development of Zen Buddhism in China," *The Chinese Social and Political Science Review*, 15 (1931): pp. 483–505; Hu Shih, "Chan (Zen) Buddhism in China: Its History and Method," *Philosophy East and West*, 3/1 (1953); also Ames, *Zen and American Thought*, p. 7.

the indigenous Japanese "way of *kami*"—Shinto. According to Hori Ichirō, "The tendency toward a harmonious fusion of Buddhism and Shinto (*shinbutsu shūgō*) became in fact one of the primary means by which Buddhism was assimilated in Japan."[36] Of course, the affirmation of some preexistent tendency here merely begs the question as to *why* there was this tendency. One reason might be the Mahāyāna Buddhist concept of *hōben* (Sk. *upāya kausālya*) or "expedient means," which suggests that the Dharma might travel in a number of diverse vehicles. Moreover, unlike Confucianism, a deliberate program of education and social ethics promoted for centuries by the Chinese elite, and unlike Daoism, which, though more overtly "spiritual" than Confucianism, was at least identifiable by a locus of classic texts like the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*, Shinto in sixth-century Japan was without an identifiable locus or a coherent set of doctrines or rituals. This is not to say that some forms of "basic Shinto" (e.g., *kami*-cults) were not deeply rooted within the lives of ordinary Japanese folk, simply that to categorize pre-Buddhist Shinto as an identifiable "religion" is highly problematic.[37] Yet, the doctrinal laxity and unsystematic character of the indigenous way of the *kami* no doubt smoothed the way for Buddhism, since there were very few areas in which the two traditions overlapped.

In the medieval period, Buddhist writers formulated an elaborate supersessionist theory to account for and justify the promiscuity of Buddhism and Shinto, based on Chinese teachings of *t'i-yung* (Jp. *taiyū*)—"(theory of) essence and function."[38] According to the doctrine of *honji suijaku* (lit., "the prime entity and its manifestations"), the Shinto *kami* are secondary manifestations of certain Buddhas or bodhisattvas. By the Kamakura period (1185–1333), an era of profound religious and political transformation, *honji suijaku* found expression in the creation of sects such as Ryōbu Shinto. Ryōbu (lit., "dual") Shinto refers to the interpretation of local Japanese *kami* associated with Shingon esoteric Buddhism, and the practices which flowed from that interpretation, beginning in the Kamakura period and extending to the Meiji Restoration. In particular, Ryōbu Shinto held that the Sun Goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami enshrined at Ise Jingū was nothing less than a manifestation of the esoteric *dharmakaya* Buddha Dainichi (Great Sun), the central Buddha of the Shingon sect. Moreover, the status of the native *kami* was raised from local folk deities and ancestral spirits to manifestations of Buddhas

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36 Hori et al., *Japanese Religion*, p. 17.

37 See the work of Kuroda Toshio, who argues that the beliefs and practices usually associated with Shinto were previously part and parcel of a larger, more embracing worldview that he calls "*kenmitsu bukkyō*" (lit., exoteric-esoteric Buddhism); Kuroda Toshio, "Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion," *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 7/1 (1981): pp. 1–21; see also James Dobbins and Suzanne Gay, "Shintō in the History of Japanese Religion: An Essay by Kuroda Toshio—Introduction," *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 7/1 (1981).

38 Charles Muller, "East Asia's Unexplored Pivot of Metaphysics and Hermeneutics: Essence-Function/Interpenetration." (Online, 2003). Available at: www.acmuller.net/articles/indigenoushermeneutics.htm [accessed November 14, 2010].

and bodhisattvas, different but equal to the most revered objects of worship in Shingon. A number of large temple-shrine complexes of the late medieval period were founded on the principles of Ryōbu Shinto.

Ichikawa notes that Edo-period figures such as Shidō Munan (1603–1676), Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768), and Tōrei Enji (1721–1792) helped to further Shinto-Zen syncretisms.[39] Beginning in the Muromachi period (1392–1573) but particularly during the Edo period, when nativist Shinto scholars began to forthrightly question the Japaneseness of Buddhism, the earlier hierarchy of *honji suijaku* was reversed to form what some scholars call *han honji suijaku*, in which Buddhas and bodhisattvas became manifestations of the singular prime entity constituted by the *kami* or, at a later stage in (State) Shinto apologetics, the Emperor.[40] At the political level, beginning in the late Meiji period and culminating in early Shōwa, the emergence of so-called State Shinto (*kokka Shintō*)—less a religion *per se* than a national institution of an ethical, mytho-historical, and of course highly ideological character—overwhelmed the conceptual structure of the indigenous Japanese religion. Precisely because of the unapologetic way in which State Shinto was employed to buttress Japanese nationalism and militarism, it became the obvious culprit in postwar reflection and reprisals. Sakamaki Shunzō goes so far as to say: "In its role as a state cult, State Shintō fed the flames of ethnocentric chauvinism that finally led to the fiery holocaust of war and the utter defeat of Japan in 1945."[41]

As noted above, at one level religio-cultural syncretism and assimilation are simply inevitable, if a religion is to spread and thrive across diverse cultures and civilizations. More significantly, any claim to the existence of a pure historical tradition carries with it an assumption of some sort of "essence." This is an admission that, in the case of Buddhism—and especially Critical Buddhism—goes against teachings of *pratītya-samutpāda* and emptiness. Therefore, the case against topicalism cannot rest on offhand remarks about the dangers of syncretism. Rather, topicalism must be given a more specific meaning and implication. In sum, it denotes a belief or presentation of some kind of substantial ground framed either in terms of a cosmic lifeforce, mind, or Buddha-nature.

In some ways, this debate has been going on for centuries within Asian Buddhism, extending back even to the earliest Indian interpretations of Buddhist teachings. Critical Buddhists' understanding of topicalism, and as a result the force of their argument, must be understood in terms of modern interpretations of

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39 Ives, *Zen Awakening*, p. 90 n.9.

40 Jacqueline Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu, 2001), p. 42. Yoshida Shinto, a syncretist sect of the Muromachi period, argued that while "Buddhism may be the flower and fruit of all principles of order (Sk. *dharma*) in the universe and Confucianism their branches and foliage … Shinto is their root and trunk" (Hori et al., *Japanese Religion*, p. 18).

41 Sakamaki Shunzō, "Shintō: Japanese Ethnocentrism," in Charles A. Moore (ed.), *The Japanese Mind* (Honolulu, 1982), p. 31.

Asian—and specifically Japanese—Buddhism, from the Edo period to the present. Although this is not clearly expressed by Hakamaya and Matsumoto themselves, there are significant differences between their understanding of *topos* and the earlier inter-Buddhist debates regarding the question of substance or essence (Sk. *svabhāva*, *prakṛti* or *dhātu*; Ch. *xing*; Jp. *shō*).[42] The most important of these can be expressed by the Critical Buddhist concern for social justice and humanistic ethics. Given the Critical Buddhist formulation, the main problem of *topos* is its actual working effects—its applications or implications. Earlier Buddhist arguments concerning the dangers of a recurrence of *Upaniṣad*-ic notions of *ātman* or *brahman* do not appear to revolve around this issue.

Jacqueline Stone makes the following judicious remarks about the "errors" of Critical Buddhism:

> The first lies in the assumption that, because immanentalist or "topical" thought has been deployed by an authoritarian ideology in modern Japan, it must have been similarly deployed in the premodern period, and in other cultures as well. This assumption leads Hakamaya in particular to paint a picture of the whole of human religious and intellectual history as a tension between "topicalists" and "criticalists," inflating a specific historical situation into a historical principle. The corollary, of course, is that because an oppressive modern ideology may draw on elements traceable to a medieval Buddhist discourse (such as original enlightenment), then that discourse must be defiled at its source and incapable ever of being assimilated to worthy ends.[43]

As Stone notes, the argument here does not appear to be very strong if this is indeed the way it is intended to work. Causation, or conditionality, collapses into a cheap form of determinism which then effectively subverts the doctrine of *karma*. More pressing than to establish a universal schema of *topica* and *critica* is the task of working through the historical and ideological usage of topical themes within Asian Buddhism—in particular modern Asian Buddhism. Along the way, a broader understanding of topical and critical thinking—one that extends beyond the modern Asian Buddhist scene—will surely contribute to building a stronger case against topicalism. To that end, let us turn to one of the major concerns of Critical Buddhism, the related doctrines of Buddha-nature (Jp. *busshō*) and *tathāgata-garbha* (Jp. *nyoraizō*).

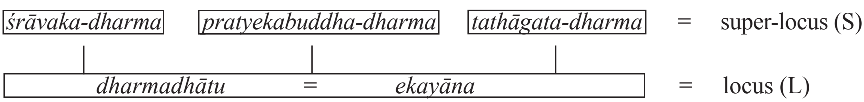
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[42] Although these terms have some variance in their use, and do not form perfect equivalents with the English terms, they have been defined according to the following range of meanings: nature, essence, substance, self-nature; (pre-)disposition, inclination, temperament; that which a person (or thing) is born with; quality, characteristic; the inner essence of something as opposed to its outer form; that which does not change according to external influences; innate, inherent, inborn; the quality or constituent by which one becomes a buddha; suchness, reality (DDB, s.v. *svabhāva*).

[43] Stone, "Some Reflections," p. 183.

The main source for the Critical Buddhist argument against Buddha-nature is Matsumoto's provocatively entitled essay, "The Doctrine of *Tathāgata-garbha* Is Not Buddhist." After laying out his vision of "true Buddhism"—one that conforms with the general Critical Buddhist understanding based on the doctrines of *anātman* and *pratītya-samutpāda* understood in a temporal rather than spatial (i.e., Huayan/Kegon) sense—Matsumoto begins his argument by citing textual evidence against the claim that the doctrine of Buddha-nature is "a teaching of equality."[44] For example, both the *Mahāyānasūtrā-laṃkāra* (Jp. *Daijō sōgonkyō ron*) and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (Jp. *Dai nehan kyō*) while suggesting that "all beings are/have the *tathāgata-garbha*," go on to assert that there remain those, the so-called *icchantika* (Jp. *issendai*), who lack the possibility of attaining *nirvāṇa*/Buddhahood. This seems to contradict the *Lotus Sutra*'s assertion that "all sentient beings will attain Buddhahood."[45]

At this stage, Matsumoto introduces the following diagram to explain his point, connecting Buddha-nature to the larger problem of substantialist thinking:



According to this structure, the "super-loci" cannot arise without the underlying "locus," which is "one," "real" and the "essential nature" of the super-loci, themselves described in opposing terms as "many" and "unreal." Finally, the most important characteristic of this schema of *dhātu-vāda* is the notion that, "'Super-loci' are not ultimately real, but have some reality in that they have arisen from the 'locus' and share its nature."[46] This last feature, according to Matsumoto, "provides the basic ideology for the establishment of social discrimination and separation. The doctrine of the fixed *gotras* … the caste system, social classes from kingship to slavery, and the like are all based on this structure."[47] Matsumoto goes on to refer to this highly topicalist structure of thinking as a "generative monism" or a "foundational realism."[48]

Does the doctrine of Buddha-nature contradict the doctrine of no-self (Sk. *anātman*; Jp. *muga*) as understood by virtue of *pratītya-samutpāda* (Jp. *engi*), as Matsumoto claims? Is *tathāgata-garbha* little more than a euphemism for substantialist thinking—what the Critical Buddhists refer to as the "pernicious view" (Sk. *ātma-dṛṣṭi*; Jp. *akken*) of *dhātu-vāda* (lit. "grasping onto substance")?

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44 Matsumoto Shirō, "The Doctrine of *Tathāgata-garbha* Is Not Buddhist," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), pp. 165–8.

45 Ibid., p. 169.

46 Ibid., p. 170.

47 Ibid., pp. 170–71.

48 Ibid., p. 172.

Sallie King claims that Matsumoto errs in reading Buddha-nature in a simplistic and "ontological" fashion, and suggests that were we to understand the doctrine as primarily, if not wholly, soteriological, then the problem of essentialism raised by Matsumoto disappears.[49] Thus, while Matsumoto may be quite right to oppose a certain reading of this idea, such that *tathāgata-garbha* becomes a "womb," "matrix," or "seed" inherent in all sentient beings—he is wrong to assume that this is the way the doctrine must be understood, or that such was its original intention. Of course, it could be argued that Matsumoto's complaint is not against the doctrine itself so much as against its historical use or effects. But if this is so, and if Matsumoto accepts that "Buddhism" is not simply what it has become in time but what it *can be* with regard to certain key doctrines that promote humanistic ethic and causes of social justice, then there surely is room for re-reading or re-inscribing doctrines like *tathāgata-garbha*. One consequence of such an undertaking is that the criteria for evaluating such doctrines become empirical rather than historical. Yet the constructive element is also important, since history is not only the place where doctrine are used, it is also the place where doctrine develop and face continual reinterpretation. King argues that in fact, far from promoting apathy or social passivity, the doctrines of *tathāgata-garbha* and Buddha-nature have been used to justify and inspire social criticism and engagement among Buddhists.[50] In short, Buddha-nature need not be conceived as some kind of substitute self, but rather a "self" that is ultimately "empty" and thus distinct from the substantial self that Critical Buddhism sees as a hindrance to liberation.

King's charge is pertinent, in that it can be extended beyond this single issue. Critical Buddhists, in their attempt to be at all times rational and logical, appear unwilling to understand certain doctrines in terms of rhetoric, topology, or eschatology/soteriology. In upholding the importance of language as a tool towards the realization of wisdom (Sk. *bodhi*), they are unwilling to take the next necessary step, and thereby fall into the thoroughly modernist trap of reifying the tool itself. Here Matsumoto and Hakamaya might do well to re-examine the Mādhyamikan distinction between conventional and ultimate truth, as one finds it in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* of Nāgārjuna.[51] The Critical Buddhists are correct in reading Nāgārjuna as an ally in the fight against the ever present danger of lapsing into *svabhāva*, but they miss important nuances in Mādhyamikan criticism, namely, the acceptance of language as a vehicle towards enlightenment, but not necessarily as a mode of designation or of mystical transformation.[52] No worshipper of silence,

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49 Sallie King, "The Doctrine of Buddha-Nature is Impeccably Buddhist," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 189.

50 Ibid., pp. 191–2.

51 Nāgārjuna (Jp. Ryūju, 150–250 CE), along with Dōgen and the *Lotus Sutra*, forms part of the holy trinity of Critical Buddhist sources.

52 Jay Garfield (tr.), *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (New York, 1995).

Nāgārjuna "focuses on purifying one's thinking, one's cognitive actions, from any vestige of substrative, substantialistic, universalistic, essentialistic notions."[53] This fits well with Hakamaya's vision of Buddhism as primarily *dharma-pravicaya* (Jp. *chakuhō*)—the clear discrimination of phenomena.[54]

Indeed, a cursory glance at the roots and early development of this doctrine confirms King's point, or at least the view that Buddha-nature can be and has been interpreted in sometimes vastly diverging ways. Daosheng (Jp. Dōshō, c.360–434), the Chinese Buddhist scholar often considered to be the father of the doctrine, or at least the primary instigator of debates surrounding its significance, drew his own position from a reading of Chapter 12 of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, which begins: "'Self' means none other than Tathāgata-garbha (Womb of the Thus Come One). All sentient beings possess Buddha-nature and that is what 'Self' precisely means."[55] From these lines, despite the element of "thusness" in the root term *tathāgata*, Daosheng deduced that Buddha-nature can be understood as "what sentient beings are going to have (or realize as the fruit of cultivation and enlightenment)."[56] This view, however, did not go unchallenged, and there soon arose at least two other prominent interpretations of Buddha-nature. Dharmakśema (Ch. Tanwuchen; Jp. Donmashin, c.385–433), Daosheng's contemporary and chief translator of the larger version of the *Nirvāṇa Sutra*, led a second school maintaining that Buddha-nature is what beings originally have, thus presaging the most common understanding of the later Japanese doctrine of *hongaku* or original enlightenment, while a third scholar, Dayao (c.400–475), took a middle path in reading Buddha-nature as the "right cause" (Ch. *Zhengyin*; Jp. *shōin*) that consists of the *li* (Jp. *ri*) for attaining Buddhahood, which all beings already possess. These three "houses" later diversified into ten or 11 different viewpoints, which in turn helped provoke the explosion of Chinese Buddhist schools in the sixth and seventh centuries.

What becomes clear, if it were not already obvious, is that Buddha-nature has no single meaning and is conditioned by its various interpretations, which are themselves contingent on historical, psychological, institutional, economic, and political factors, some or most of which are now impossible to ascertain. This should not lead us to despair or to the simple relativist answer that there is no truth to the matter—an argument that cannot be consistently maintained on relativist premises. Our task is not to add to a debate over which is the true sense of

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[53] Dan Lusthaus, "Critical Buddhism and Returning to the Sources," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 43.

[54] Hakamaya Noriaki, "Critical Philosophy versus Topical Philosophy," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 74.

[55] NS 12.

[56] Kim Young-Ho, *Tao-Sheng's Commentary on the Lotus Sutra: A Study and Translation* (Albany, 1990), p. 65.

Buddha-nature in the historical or ideal sense; rather, it is to examine the particular implications and effects of the various alternative readings, and to determine the "truth" of Buddha-nature on the basis of other Buddhist—and perhaps, extra-Buddhist—doctrines and concerns. Let us turn back to Matsumoto's assertion that Buddha-nature is a form—perhaps the most prominent form—of so-called *dhātu-vāda* thought, which in turn provides a basis for social discrimination within Buddhist tradition.

Leaving aside for the moment Matsumoto's claim that what he calls the *dhātu-vada* structure of thinking based on the doctrine of *tathāgata-garbha* has been a direct cause of social discrimination throughout Asian Buddhist history, let us examine the structure itself as it is presented in his essay "The Doctrine of *Tathāgata-garbha* Is Not Buddhist." It is hard to argue against his thesis that such a structure, as presented here, contradicts the Buddhist teachings of *pratītya-samutpāda* and emptiness in favor of something much more akin to the *ātman* or *brahman* of early Indic thought. However, given the range of interpretations to be found in the sutras, it is also obvious that there is no single understanding of Buddha-nature in this way, leaving Matsumoto's charge open to critique on the basis of alternative texts. As noted above, the theory of *t'i-yung* (Jp. *taiyū*)—which has played a large role in the development of virtually all streams of East Asian Buddhism—helps us read Matsumoto's chart in a slightly different and less topicalist way. Although often translated as "essence," *t'i* implied something more like "the physical body as an assemblage of its parts,"[57] and, according to Charles Muller, was eventually transformed into a philosophical term used to refer to "the deeper, more fundamental or invisible aspect of things, the 'principle' of things, as opposed to their more outwardly manifest, phenomenal aspects."[58] There is no sense here of the *topos* or locus being of a different or higher order than the function itself—nor is there a strong sense of it being unchanging or any more "real."

Matsumoto clearly reads the "locus" in the above diagram as a parallel to the *Upaniṣad*-ic *brahman* or to the *logos* of Hellenic and Christian thought. Yet understanding it as *t'i* in the sense just described transforms the picture dramatically. The super-loci (*yung*) of the locus (*t'i*) are not in any way less real; they are simply the various ways the locus functions or becomes manifest. Moreover, as Muller notes, the particular manifestations themselves can and will penetrate the essence in turn, by virtue of the process of realization. Thus, rather than being a basis or ground for the super-loci, the locus itself is simply a name for what the phenomena share or aspire to produce: i.e., their "essence" in the common-sensical rather than philosophical sense of the term. As such, the Chinese *t'i* resembles, but does not quite replicate, the sense of the original Sanskrit *garbha*—referring, as Matsumoto notes, to something like womb, storehouse, empty space, pouch, or pocket to be

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[57] In standard dictionaries of modern Japanese, the character 體 is conflated with the commonly used character 体 (*karada*), which literally means "(physical) body."

[58] Muller, "East Asia's Unexplored Pivot," p. 3.

filled—but which also in some way acts upon all phenomena as a principle or seed. It is, to borrow a term from literary critic Harold Bloom, a "strong misreading" of the Indian term for Sinitic purposes.[59] According to Bloom, "strong poets" make the history of poetry by misreading one another, through an act of what Bloom calls "poetic misprision." We should ask, with Richard Rorty, whether "strong thinkers" do something similar, through their own series of misprisions—or what Rorty calls "redescriptions"?[60]

As Jacqueline Stone concludes, Chinese schools such as Tiantai and Huayan reflect an important shift away from the apophatic inclinations of Indian Mādhyamika to a more kataphatic style. Yet, these new modes of expression "attempt neither to reimport into Buddhism notions of metaphysical essence nor to claim that there can be adequate verbal descriptions for truth, but to employ positive language in soteriologically effective ways."[61] Without extending this point further, it is of interest to note that, even in a modern dictionary, the Sino-Japanese character used to write *tatha*—Ch. *ru*; Jp. *nyo*, *jo*, *goto(ki)*, *goto(shi)*—has a number of non-substantialist connotations, including "like," "such as," "as if," and "seem to be." This understanding of the impact of Chinese categories and terms on understandings of *tathāgata-garbha* further complicates the readings of Buddha-nature presented by both Matsumoto and King.

In order to come to a clearer understanding of Buddha-nature, we must reflect upon the corollary Mahāyāna doctrines of emptiness and interpenetration. As Blocker and Starling note, the major Chinese Buddhist schools—Tiantai, Huayan, and Chan—generally accepted the view that "the changing, dependent, phenomenal world is simply a false way of seeing the eternal, ultimate reality."[62] This was indeed a logical extension of the doctrine of Buddha-nature: if Buddha-nature is everything, then *there is nothing other than* Buddha-nature. Yet Chinese Buddhists did not fall too readily into a form of quasi-Platonic essentialism in working out the meaning of Buddha-nature: in looking at, say, dried grass, they would conclude that though the "real nature" of the grass is indeed nothing less than the Buddha, there is no corresponding Buddha-essence or ideal located somewhere *beyond*, *behind*, or *in addition to* the grass. For Buddha-nature is, after all, empty; or, we might more properly say, it is *emptiness* or even, as predicate without subject, the process of *emptying* itself. This was further radicalized in the Japanese context. For Japanese Buddhists, the Buddha is *nothing but* this dried grass. According to Blocker and Starling, such a turn denotes the typically Japanese "reduction of unseen metaphysical entities to the sensual, aesthetic delight in ordinary sense perception."[63] If this tendency can be found in Japanese interpretations of Buddha-

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[59] Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York, 1975).

[60] Richard Rorty, "Ethics without Principles," in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London, 1999), pp. 87–8.

[61] Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, p. 10.

[62] Blocker and Starling, *Japanese Philosophy*, pp. 30–31.

[63] Ibid., pp. 31–2.

nature, then Critical Buddhist concerns in this regard are indeed exaggerated. Let us turn now to the work of Dōgen for further clues to this matter.

In his *Shōbōgenzō* (Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma), perhaps the closest thing to a Bible for Critical Buddhism, Dōgen quotes a passage from the *Nirvāṇa Sutra* to the effect that "All sentient beings without exception have the Buddha-nature: *Tathāgata* (Buddha) is permanent with no change at all."[64] As scholars have long noted, Dōgen reads this famous passage in an unconventional—and grammatically incorrect—fashion, such that it becomes: "All are sentient beings, all beings are (all being is) the Buddha-Nature; *Tathāgata* is permanent, non-being, being, and change." This is a far more Nāgārjunian expression, including as it does a tetralemmic conclusion straight out of the MMK itself. Clearly, Dōgen felt uneasy with the permanence of the original line, and none-too-subtly rewrote it to suit his own doctrinal vision—acting as one of our "strong thinkers."

Elsewhere, Dōgen writes that "Although [awakening] is abundantly inherent in everyone, as long as one does not practice it, it is not manifest, and as long as one has not experienced it, there is no attainment."[65] This passage is commonly cited to point to the need for practical cultivation or ethical works, precisely *because* of the inherence of Buddha-nature and not at all *in spite* of such. Dōgen's understanding of Buddha-nature conflates two Buddhist doctrines into one: "Impermanence," he proclaims, "is Buddha-nature" (*mujō busshō*).[66] Dōgen cites the Sixth Patriarch as being the teacher of this notion, which clearly contradicts the *Nirvāṇa Sutra*'s teaching that Buddha-nature is permanence. Important here is the element of equiprimordiality: Buddha-nature, Dōgen insists, is not merely incorporated prior to awakening but is incorporated or instantiated *along with* the attainment of Buddhahood. Dōgen calls this "the truth of Buddha-nature."[67] This notion of "simultaneous attainment of the Way" is called *dōji-jōdō*, and refers to the idea that *everything* in the universe attains enlightenment at the moment of one's own enlightenment. Abe adds that this concept of awakening "opens up the universal horizon of Buddha-nature."[68] Dōgen effectively eliminates the conventional understanding of Buddha-nature as an independent doctrine, collapsing it into doctrines of impermanence, emptiness, and awakening—its only distinction lying in its rhetorical power as a form of "skillful means."

Elsewhere in the *busshō* fascicle, Dōgen makes the additional extraordinary claim:

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64 See Eidō Shimano and Charles Vacher (tr.), *Dōgen: Shōbōgenzō busshō* (Paris, 2002), pp. 29–31, for a detailed explanation of Dōgen's interpretation.

65 Cleary, *Rational Zen*, p. 31.

66 G. 22; see Abe Masao, *Zen and Western Thought* (Honolulu, 1985), p. 108; Abe Masao, *A Study of Dōgen* (Albany, 1992), p. 28; Eidō and Vacher, *Dōgen*, pp. 211–23. See Eidō and Vacher, *Dōgen*, p. 210 n.74.

67 G. 22.

68 Abe, *A Study of Dōgen*, p. 50.

> Shakyamuni preaches that "all sentient beings without exception have the Buddha-nature." Ta-kuei (Jp. Isan Reiyū, 771–853) preaches that "all sentient beings have no Buddha-nature." The words "have" and "have not" are totally different in principle. Doubts will understandably arise as to which utterance is correct. However, in the Buddha Way, "all sentient beings have no Buddha-nature" is alone pre-eminent. You must without fail devote yourself to the truth of "no Buddha-nature," never remitting your efforts.[69]

Thus, "[f]ollowing Nāgārjuna … and Aryadeva … Dōgen adopts a radical Buddhism, not one of any negative ontology, but one negating all ontology."[70] Abe comments on this passage in what might be considered a more orthodox fashion, suggesting that by "no Buddha-nature" Dōgen does not imply the opposite of Buddha-nature, but rather an *absolute* no-Buddha-nature that remains "free" from both "Buddha-nature" and "no-Buddha-nature."[71] This corresponds with Dōgen's citation of the following words of Chinese master Baizhang Huaihai (Jp. Hyakujo Ekai, 749–814): "To preach that sentient beings have Buddha-nature is to disparage Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. To preach that sentient beings have no Buddha-nature is to disparage Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha."[72]

We must return to Dōgen's emphasis on *mujōbusshō*—impermanence-as-Buddha-nature. Not only is "[t]he very impermanence of men and things, body and mind … the Buddha-nature," even "Supreme and complete enlightenment, because it is the Buddha-nature, is impermanent. Great nirvana, because it is impermanent, is the Buddha-nature."[73] What is most significant in Dōgen's willful misreading of the doctrine of Buddha-nature is not even so much the tetralemmic evasion of permanence, but the implication that Buddha-nature is *not* a potentiality—a seed waiting to flower—within sentient beings; rather it is *another name for sentience itself*. In other words, Buddha-nature is not a quality, not something that people or things *have*; it is the very condition of existence. Abe concludes: "In Dōgen, the Buddha-nature, the ultimate Reality, is realized precisely in this infinite and ontological dimension in which all things can exist respectively as they are."[74] Yet Abe overstresses the ontological aspect *vis-à-vis* the soteriological. After all, Dōgen wants at all costs to avoid the idea that Buddha-nature is prior to or "causes" enlightenment; rather, he argues that they "occur" simultaneously, for the simple reason that they are one and the same.[75]

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69 G. 22; trans. by Abe, *A Study of Dōgen*, p. 52; see Eidō and Vacher, *Dōgen*, pp. 367–71 for an alternative translation.

70 Eidō and Vacher, *Dōgen*, p. 46.

71 Abe, *A Study of Dōgen*, p. 52.

72 G. 22; trans. by Abe, *A Study of Dōgen*, p. 96.

73 Ibid.

74 Abe, *Zen and Western Thought*, p. 36.

75 Also see Waddell and Abe for an argument that, in his 1243 version of the *Fukanzazengi* Dōgen shifted emphasis such that, "the idea of dhyana or samadhi as a

Something of the same idea can be seen in the following passage from the *gyōji* fascicle, which relates to the idea of continuous practice: "By virtue of this continuous practice (*gyōji*) there are sun, moon, and stars. By virtue of this continuous practice, there are earth, sky, and heat within the body and without, the four elements and the five skandhas."[76]

In Dōgen's re-interpretation of Buddha-nature, any lingering implications of substance are cut away by: a) an emphasis on Buddha-nature as a condition—*the* condition?—of sentient being, b) an explicit conflation of Buddha-nature and impermanence, c) a radical reformulation of Buddha-nature as nothing more or less than "practice" itself. The last aspect is particularly important for Critical Buddhism, because it gives Buddha-nature not only soteriological but also ethical import. Indeed, one of the most common criticisms of Buddha-nature is precisely the seeming passivity of the notion—the idea that if one is already "awakened," then practice or cultivation—religious, ethical, or otherwise—falls by the wayside. Though himself one of the main prophets of Critical Buddhism, Ichikawa Hakugen agrees with Sallie King and against Matsumoto that the doctrine of Buddha-nature can be a theoretical basis for social equality. After all, the *Nirvāṇa Sutra* itself states quite strongly that not only great evildoers (Sk. *icchantika*), even women (!) are capable of enlightenment if they work for it—though in the case of the latter not through regular religious channels, which were closed to them.

Turning again to history: in 816, still somewhat embittered by his falling out with Kūkai (774–835), Japanese Tendai sect founder Saichō (767–822) traveled to eastern Honshū where he met and engaged in a vigorous debate with a Hossō (Yogācāra) sect priest named Tokuichi (or Tokuitsu, d. 841). The debate concerned the doctrine of Buddha-nature. Tokuichi, following traditional Yogācāra views, held that there are five distinct classes of beings, each of which follows a distinct path:

1. Bodhisattva;
2. *Pratyeka-buddha* (Jp. *dokugaku*);
3. *Śrāvaka* (Jp. *deshi*);
4. Those of indeterminate nature; and
5. *Icchantika*.

Of these, the last category of beings lack potentiality for enlightenment; they are doomed to wander forever in delusion. Saichō famously rejected this, teaching rather, in the footsteps of Daosheng, that all sentient beings are capable of

means to enlightenment has totally disappeared, and in its place there is a corresponding accentuation of the oneness of practice and realization" (Norman Waddell and Abe Masao [tr.], "Dōgen's Fukanzazengi," *Eastern Buddhist*, 6/2 [1973]: p. 118).

[76] Quoted in John Maraldo, "The Hermeneutics of Practice in Dōgen and Francis of Assisi: An Exercise in Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," *Eastern Buddhist*, 14/2 (1981): pp. 22–45.

Buddhahood. Here is clear precedent for an understanding of Buddha-nature as a foundation for "spiritual"—if not "social" equality.[77]

If, however, the notion of universal Buddha-nature has such liberatory potential, why does it not appear to have had such actual effects within Asian Buddhist history? Ichikawa argues that the reason Buddha-nature has not generally been used in such a socially liberating way is that it has been trumped in Buddhist tradition by the persistence of the ancient Indian notion of *karma* (Jp. *gō*): "The theory that individual distinctiveness due to the law of cause and effect spanning past, present and future constitutes true equality and justice came into being, and this theory provided a foundation for social orders with people in proper places."[78] Indeed, using *karma* to justify social inequality is not confined to the Indian caste-system or to the premodern past. Shimaji Mokurai (1838–1911), a Shin Buddhist leader often associated with the Meiji Buddhist Enlightenment, published an essay entitled "Shabetsu byōdō" (Differentiation is Equality), which applied the *soku-hi* (yes and no) logic of Zen to the traditional doctrine of *karma* to confirm that a person's social standing in the world was the result of past actions. This argument was employed by Shimaji and a few other leading Buddhists to reject the doctrine of "evil equality" (*aku byōdō*) being imported into Japan from the West.[79] Ironically, this heavy reliance on historical determinism through the unfolding of *karma* renders such a Buddhist view completely ahistorical in the sense that it fails to account for the actual social, economic, political, and psychological factors which shape human action and behavior. Brian Victoria suggests that this fatalistic rendering of *karma* plays a role in postwar Japan's unwillingness to discuss wartime responsibilities.[80] Buddhists and Buddhist scholars today continue to debate the meaning and relevance of this ancient Indian doctrine for Buddhism, past and present, Asian and Western. Whatever the answer, it does seem evident, as Damien Keown has argued, that early Buddhist writers and scholars had a more nuanced and flexible view of *karma* than was present in the orthodox Indian traditions.[81] Thus, we might say, a deterministic reading of *karma* effectively subverts the Buddhist doctrine of *pratītya-samutpāda*.

Ichikawa argues that besides *karma* another factor working against a proper understanding of Buddha-nature is the particularly Japanese philosophy of debt (*on*), which he relates directly to *engi* (Sk. *pratītya-samutpāda*). *On* refers to the debt of obligation one faces with respect to something received from another. "With the perspective of dependent co-arising [*engi*] as its backdrop, the philosophy of debt was the center of Buddhist ethics." Here too, however, historical and

[77] See Tamura Yoshirō, "Critique of Original Awakening Thought in Shōshin and Dōgen" *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 11 (1984): p. 246.

[78] Ives, *Zen Awakening*, p. 92.

[79] See Brian Victoria, "When God(s) and Buddhas Go to War" (unpublished manuscript, 2002), p. 9.

[80] Victoria, *Zen War Stories* (London, 2003), pp. 158–9.

[81] Damien Keown, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 37–9.

political developments led to a subtle but significant shift in the way *on* came to be understood: "out of the four types of debt (to parents, ruler, sentient beings, and either heaven/earth or the three treasures …) the debt to one's parents changed into the debt to the emperor in the context of Japanese patriarchal theocracy, and the debt to sentient beings became less important."[82] For Ichikawa, then, *tathāgata-garbha* has definite liberatory potential and may be used to combat a vision of Buddhist social order based on *karma* and an attenuated reading of *on*. We will return to the use and "abuse" of *karma* below.

Closely wedded to traditional East Asian understandings of the doctrine of Buddha-nature is the more particularly Japanese idea of *hongaku* or "original enlightenment." Early on in the history of Japanese Tendai Buddhism we see the development of the theory of *hongaku hōmon*—i.e., the idea that enlightenment is not something to be achieved through gradual elimination of attachment to illusory phenomena, but is rather something to be discovered as innately given:

> Elaborating the concept of "emptiness" propounded by Nagarjuna, the *hh* [i.e., *hongaku hōmon*] theory involves an ontology of absolute monism or nondualism. In brief, this way of looking at things maintains that while one cannot avoid dualistic antitheses such as those between life and death, deluded blindness and spiritual understanding … etc., he can, if he will but open his eyes, discover the ineradicable, naturally given enlightenment that transcends all those polarities. More fundamentally, this original enlightenment (*hongaku*) cannot be found if one adheres either to the seeming reality of the dualistic realm or even to ontological nondualism.[83]

Tiantai/Tendai Buddhism is generally considered to be the main source of *hongaku* ideas within medieval Sino-Japanese Buddhism, though some contemporary scholars argue that original enlightenment results from an early fusion or accommodation between insurgent Buddhism and the ancient Shinto belief that everything in the world is filled with *kami*. While Nara schools such as Kegon (Ch. Huayan) placed emphasis on the interrelation of things, Tendai understood Buddha-nature to imply that since the Buddha reality includes everything in the world, and thus everything includes within itself the Buddha reality, it follows that everything in the world *contains* everything else. In other words, in a line resembling the flights of the European Romantic poets, the whole world is contained in a grain of sand. Within this teaching we see some of Tendai's esoteric flavor. It was through Tendai that the more particularly Japanese notion of original enlightenment (*hongaku*) became connected with the idea of Buddha-nature. *Hongaku* implies that not only do all beings have a Buddha-seed or spark, they are in fact already enlightened, and thus only have to realize that this is true. According to Hakamaya:

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[82] Ives, *Zen Awakening*, p. 93 n.100.

[83] Hori et al., *Japanese Religion*, p. 57.

> The idea of "original enlightenment" refers to a fundamental enlightenment that transcends the phenomenal world. All people are by nature primordially endowed with this enlightenment, which exists eternally. Since the doctrine implies that, at a level preceding awareness, the phenomenal transformations of samsara remain, it is of a single piece with the idea of "eternal mind and perishable phenomena."[84]

Hakamaya goes on to suggest that this was not only the dominant understanding of original enlightenment in the Tendai tradition, but that it has become—or, at any rate, has come to be understood as—"*the* central philosophy of [Japanese] Buddhism."[85] Moreover, far from being an egalitarian notion that served as the basis for social harmony, as has been suggested by Umehara Takeshi[86] among others, it became the "dominant force behind the perpetuation of social discrimination" in Japan.[87] Such criticism is not new. Taishō and Shōwa-era scholars Shimaji Daitō (1875–1927)[88] and Shigyō Kaishū (1907–1968) made similar claims about the moral destructiveness of Tendai original enlightenment thought, siding, as many scholars have done to this day, with the so-called reformers of the Kamakura period in their quest to eliminate such distorted and dangerous teachings in order to return to a "practical" and "humane" Buddhism.[89]

Jacqueline Stone develops a more nuanced view of the subject of original enlightenment in her seminal study on *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (1999). Stone argues that it is a mistake to assume, as many scholars do, that *hongaku* is a coherent system of thought or philosophical school (i.e., *shisō*), rather than an extraordinarily complex paradigm or matrix—she uses the term "mode of discourse"—interpreted in various ways over time and across sects. To cite several examples, the emergence in China of Huayan and Tiantai was a period beset with varying and competing understandings of *tathāgata-garbha* vis-à-vis notions of 'suchness' and the "originally pure mind." Zhiyi (Jp. Chigi, 538–597), the founder of Tiantai, emphasized the mutual inclusiveness of all dharmas and the mind, over against existing Yogācāra and emergent Huayan notions of the priority of the mind in its "primal purity." Somewhat later, sixth Tiantai patriarch Chanjan (Jp. Tanzen,

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84 Hakamaya, "Scholarship as Criticism," p. 344.

85 Ibid. See Stone's criticism of the notion of original enlightenment thought as being distinctively or quintessentially "Japanese," as suggested by numerous scholars including Tamura Yoshirō; Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, pp. 52–3.

86 Umehara Takeshi, "Bukkyō no Nihonteki tenkai," *Tenbō* (1985): pp. 20–21.

87 Hakamaya, "Scholarship as Criticism," p. 344.

88 Credited by Jacqueline Stone as having introduced the concept of "original enlightenment thought" (*hongaku shisō*) to the Japanese academic world (Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, p. 3).

89 Ibid., pp. 64–5, 71.

711–782) appropriated Huayan terms in order to make a case against the "one-sided [notion] of a clean and pure suchness."[90]

A century later, in Japan, Saichō and Kūkai, founders of the Japanese Tendai and Shingon schools respectively, became the first major Japanese thinkers to interpret and develop the concept of original enlightenment. The former developed his interpretation largely in the context of his famous debate with Hossō scholar Tokuichi over the inclusivity of Buddha-nature and the notion of *icchantika*s (see above). Once again, like his Chinese forebears, Saichō adopted the terms of his rivals to develop a unique stance on these matters, one which accepts the twofold nature of suchness—quiescent and dynamic—while prioritizing the latter over the former, a move which re-asserts the general Sinitic tendency to concretize Indian metaphysical concepts. "Saichō's understanding of 'suchness according with conditions' … represents a crucial step toward the profound valorization of empirical reality found in medieval Tendai original enlightenment thought."[91] On the other hand, borrowing even more directly from Huayan/Kegon than from Tiantai, Kūkai developed his own unique reading of the doctrine in terms of a distinction between two forms of original enlightenment: "both tainted and pure," and "clean and pure." While the former reflects earlier Chinese versions such as that found in the *Awakening of Faith* (Sk. *Mahāyāna-śraddhotpāda-śāstra*; Ch. *Dasheng qixinlun*; Jp. *Daijōkishinron*), the latter indicates a more strongly mystical, transformative experience by which one realizes Buddhahood "in this very body." "In the latter sense … it is given a more absolute reading, much closer to suchness itself, or to the ontological basis of the nonduality of beings and the Buddha."[92]

Besides noting the complexity in the development of the doctrine, which, as with Buddha-nature, makes any blanket rejection of it difficult if not impossible to sustain, Stone also rejects the common picture of the leaders of the various new Kamakura Buddhisms inculcating a successful "reform" of a corrupt, morally bankrupt institutionalized Buddhism dominated by the Tendai sect, a central part of which consisted of throwing away the Tendai *hongaku* doctrine. There is no clear evidence that the monks of these "new" Buddhisms were any less corrupt or morally deficient than those of Tendai, Shingon, or the earlier Nara schools, nor that they rid themselves of *hongaku* thought entirely. Rather, Stone avers, original enlightenment was carried over, though generally reinterpreted, to suit the needs of the new sects. Stone's work is largely a detailed analysis of the many and various ways in which this process took place.[93]

Although Stone does not have much to say about Critical Buddhism in her work on original enlightenment, elsewhere she confronts the Critical Buddhist analysis of *hongaku* only to conclude that it misses the mark for several reasons.

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[90] Ibid., p. 9.

[91] Ibid., p. 14.

[92] Ibid., p. 11; see Shimaji, "Chūko Tendai."

[93] See her Conclusion for a brief but illuminating summary of this process (Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, pp. 356–67).

First, as noted above, it is not easy to clarify what *hongaku* refers to in the early Chinese and Japanese contexts. Second, even assuming that one can make a broad category definition of original enlightenment thought, it is even less clear that the doctrine was used in any systematic fashion to support injustice during the period of its development in the two countries. What Stone does allow, and this is a significant point, is that there is more evidence for the ideological usage of *hongaku* in the early modern and modern periods in Japan, from Tokugawa though Meiji to Shōwa, than from the medieval Heian and Kamakura periods.[94] There is no way to judge *hongaku*—at least in its earlier forms—as being outrightly topicalist and hence non-Buddhist. This does not mean that we must simply accept all versions as equally beneficial or persuasive. What is required is a) detailed investigation of the various forms or readings of *hongaku* as they emerged in medieval Japan, and b) further analysis of the development of *hongaku shisō*—in particular the apparently topicalist versions of such—in the Edo and Meiji periods, as Japan developed a modern society and, ultimately, a nationalist ideology. Stone's *Original Enlightenment* provides much in the way of the first, and includes a call for the second.

Hakamaya's argument needs to be fleshed out more clearly as to the "obvious harm" of the doctrine of original enlightenment. Rather than dwell upon the case of Dōgen and his attempt—via criticism of the Senika heresy[95]—to reverse the topicalist undercurrents of his day, Hakamaya extends the discussion to parallel currents within Meiji and Taishō Sōtō Zen. Most significant are Hakamaya's citation and comments on an extended passage (a small portion of which is cited above) from a Taishō era sermon on the *Shushōgi*, a Meiji-era compilation of Sōtō teachings based on the *Shōbōgenzō*. The *Shushōgi* provides a familiar explanation of *karma*, as found within most forms of Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition. However, on what would appear a rather straightforward rendering of karmic causality, the Taishō-era sermon erects a distinctive framework.

> The original foundation of the cosmos is one reality, the same and equal, with no separation between even the most minute particles; however, within the true essence of that one reality, same and equal, a single great spiritual force exists of its own power. That spiritual power manifests a wondrous function based upon the law of the universe that has not changed from past to present; that law is called the principle of cause and effect … The environment of those who give rise to an evil mind and practice evil gradually degenerates, their position falls, and the nation becomes defiled; in contrast, the position of those who give rise to virtuous mind and cultivate virtue ascends and the world becomes pure. Thus

[94] Ibid., p. 359.

[95] The Senika or "naturalistic" heresy is based on the teachings of Senika, reputedly a brahmin contemporary of Śākyamuni who preached the existence of an eternal soul, separate from the impermanent body. He became a favorite target of Dōgen's criticism (see, e.g., G. 22; Eidō and Vacher, *Dōgen*, pp. 69–71).

> we must resign ourselves to the fact that the reason we are born into this world and experience various and myriad punishments and rewards is entirely due to the causes and conditions of past lives.[96]

There are many ways, Buddhist or otherwise, by which we might criticize this sermon. Hakamaya himself tackles a number of what appear to be, from his perspective, its most egregious failings, for instance, what he calls the "deceptive logic" or sleight-of-hand that moves from a statement of original harmony to an affirmation of the inevitable disparities among human beings. While it is certainly true, contra Hakamaya, that a logic of emanation from original unity to multiplicity has been worked out in the West via Plotinus and the Neoplatonist tradition,[97] his point relates more strongly to the fact that the narrative in the above sermon moves so quickly and without justification—other than the invocation of *karma*—from unity to multiplicity to a kind of fatalistic differentialism. Most significant, though, is the initial assumption of what is elsewhere referred to as an "ocean of true being," which is the source and foundation of the cosmos, and from which causality itself "arises." This notion appears to contradict the very section of the *Shōbōgenzō* that it is meant to uphold. While Dōgen in this fascicle does indeed point to the importance of belief in causality, he does not make the threefold leap by which a) causality emerges from a single undifferentiated ground, b) causality is exhausted by karma, c) causality/karma is determinative of our position in life.[98]

Hakamaya is quite right to level his Critical Buddhist guns against the above sermon. Indeed, it would be hard for anyone to argue that this vision fits with the work of Dōgen, Nāgārjuna, or mainstream Mahāyāna perspectives on emptiness and *pratītya-samutpāda*. However, this does not make the idea particularly new or confined to the Sōtō sect. Indeed, such usage of the doctrine of *karma* to justify and explain social differences and discrimination has broad appeal not only in the past but also in contemporary Buddhist societies. In fact, deterministic understandings of *karma* have had a deeper and more devastating impact on Buddhist social ethics than any other notion, including Buddha-nature and original enlightenment, the two main foils of Critical Buddhism. The above-cited sermon, for all its topicalist overtones, relies most heavily upon the notion of *karma* as being "the wondrous function based upon the law of the universe." In a sense, Hakamaya is barking up the wrong doctrinal tree. Topicalism itself, the allegedly non-Buddhist idea of a ground or locus beneath or beyond or before all phenomenal reality as expressed in some versions of Buddha-nature and original enlightenment, appears to be less of a threat than the law of *karma*, or at any rate a certain very common reading of *karma* as a justification for injustice and social discrimination.[99]

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96 Hakamaya, "Scholarship as Criticism," p. 345.

97 See Maurice Boutin, "L'Un dispersif: Examen d'une requête récente," in *Neoplatonismo e Religione* (Padua, 1983), pp. 253–79, 479.

98 G. 89, *jinshin inga*.

99 See Stone, "Some Reflections," p. 184.

Although the history of Buddhist interpretations and uses of the doctrine of *karma* is too complicated to be tackled here, a few comments regarding the place of *karma* vis-à-vis critical thinking and topicalism are in order. While *karma* is a fundamental idea that pervades Buddhism from its very beginnings, many scholars have noted that, at least at the doctrinal level, Buddhist notions of *karma* are not identical to those of other Indian religions such as Jainism or Hinduism.[100] Although the difference has been explained in various ways, one conclusion often reached is that Buddhism, while taking *karma* very seriously as a fact about existence, does not privilege karmic causality over the workings of causality as a whole. In other words, the more fundamental Buddhist understanding of the universe is that *everything* is causally conditioned and arises in equiprimordiality—*karma* is simply the moral aspect of this more general condition.

The specifically Buddhist understanding of *karma* is complicated by another fundamental Buddhist idea: *anātman* or no-self. Although the belief in the effects of *karma* on future lives did not disappear in Buddhism, the idea of a stable and continuing self, as anything other than a fictive illusion, is put into serious question. "The Buddhist idea of no-self and dependent origination [*pratītya-samutpāda*] is a complete rejection of such a reincarnating permanent essence. Rebirth is about process and a continuing stream of events rather than an eternal soul which takes on new bodies."[101] This means that Buddhist understandings of *karma* shift the focus away from the baggage gained by a continually-reborn self to what might be called the moral conditioning side of the more fundamental idea of *pratītya-samutpāda*. In this sense, the notion of personal fate or destiny, i.e., the tendency to read backwards from karmic consequences to karmic causes—in short, *karma* as determinative of one's social, political, economic, and moral destiny—loses its explanatory power and its doctrinal footing within Buddhist contexts. While *karma* acquired in past lives will have an effect on a person's circumstances and actions, and thus will condition them, this cannot be seen as a simple cause-effect scenario, because:

a. The self is not a simple constant;
b. Causes are manifold and extend beyond moral actions to include various other conditions—social, political, economic—over which an individual person has very little control (a contemporary social theorist or Marxist might speak here of structural factors); and
c. According to most Buddhist traditions, only a Buddha or about-to-become-a-Buddha is able to correctly and clearly see the past results of *karma* in successive rebirths.[102]

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[100] See Keown, *Buddhism*, pp. 37–9; David Burton, *Buddhism, Knowledge and Liberation: A Philosophical Study* (Aldershot, 2004), p. 13; Abe, *Zen and Western Thought*, p. 214.

[101] Burton, *Buddhism, Knowledge and Liberation*, p. 14.

[102] See, e.g., *Majjhima Nikaya*: *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston, 1995), section 1, pp. 22–3, where the Buddha, at the moment before reaching enlightenment,

As Damien Keown notes, the doctrine of *karma*:

> does not claim that everything is karmically determined. Many of the things that happen in life—like winning the lottery or breaking a leg—may simply be accidents. Karma does not determine precisely what will happen or how anyone will react to what happens. Individuals are free to resist previous conditioning and establish new patterns of behaviour: such, indeed, is the point of becoming a Buddhist.[103]

Once again, it would be a mistake to assume that *karma* can be easily dropped or dismissed as irrelevant to Buddhist goals, for several reasons. First, it has been continually cited and utilized within virtually all strands of historical Buddhist thought and teachings, although often in ways quite distinct with Keown's interpretation. Buddhist cosmology rests on the Wheel of Life (Sk. *bhavacakra*, Jp. *shōjirin*), which includes various—generally six—spheres or levels in which one may be reborn, based largely if not entirely on the accumulation of merit (Sk. *punya*), which is in turn based on one's karmic activities. In the *Lam rim chen mo*, Tibetan master and Gelukpa sect founder Tsongkhapa (1355–1417) notes the suffering of "repeatedly descending from high to low" in the spheres of existence as a result of *karma* is one of the six types of Buddhist suffering.[104] On the other hand, an apocryphal but widely circulated Chinese text entitled *Yingluo jing* (Sutra on Cause and Fruits; Jp. *Yōrakukyō*) explicitly propagates the view that if a person is born blind or deaf it is because he or she "maligned the Dharma" in a past existence. Thus, *karma* is intrinsic to most if not all Asian Buddhist cosmologies. Second, and perhaps more significant, *karma* is one of the most widely understood ideas among Buddhist lay-practitioners, even though popular interpretations generally fail to reflect attempts by Buddhist thinkers to clarify and nuance the idea in properly Buddhist terms. Melford Spiro, in a way that seems to prefigure the Critical Buddhists, distinguishes between two forms of Theravāda Buddhist tradition: the "kammatic" tradition—which focuses on a foundational belief in *karma* and emphasizes ethical conduct undertaken for the benefit of a higher rebirth; and the "nibbanic" tradition—which looks to the achievement of awakening or liberation from craving and suffering.[105] This argument, however, is too simplistic, as it suggests that the two spheres are distinct paths rather than intricately interwoven strands, as they are within most Buddhist traditions.

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perceives in full detail all of his past lives, as well as the past lives and karmic consequences of all beings; also *Moliyasivaka Sutta*, Nyanaponika Thera (tr.), in *Contemplation of Feeling: The Discourse-grouping on the Feelings* (Kandy, 1983), section 36.21.

103 Keown, *Buddhism*, p. 39.

104 Tsongkhapa, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment, Volume 1* (Ithaca, 2000), pp. 281–7.

105 Since he is writing about Theravadā, Spiro uses the Pali forms of *karma* and *nirvāṇa*.

Moreover, Spiro goes on to claim that whereas those following the kammatic path will engage primarily in ethical activity (Sk. *śīla*), those on the nibbanic side deny the worth of such in favor of the practice of meditation.[106] Again, while this strict discontinuity does not reflect the reality of the way the majority of Buddhists live, the suggestion that awakening or enlightenment is often viewed as being above or beyond ethics and moral conduct is of some relevance to Critical Buddhism.

In Japanese Buddhist thought the connection between doctrines of original enlightenment and *karma* renders the whole issue more complicated still. A number of medieval Tendai texts conflate the two notions in the motto: "*karma* is precisely liberation" (*gō soku gedatsu*)—which means that, because of the originally nondual, pure essence of all actions, even deluded actions ultimately manifest the constant interpenetration of *dharmas*. This formulation renders *karma* a subset of the more encompassing doctrines of emptiness, impermanence, and original enlightenment. As such, the statement "*karma* is liberation" is, according to Stone, meant to be an ontological rather than a moral statement; even those advocating it were aware of the potential danger of this idea and warned that it should be taught only to those at a very advanced level of training, lest it be taken as an excuse for license.[107] On the one hand, this displacement or dissolving of *karma* into emptiness and impermanence has the potential benefit of taking away the use of *karma* as a post-facto justification for discrimination or the blithe acceptance of caste or class hierarchies. On the other hand, this boon is balanced by the antinomian implications inherent to the doctrine of original enlightenment, such that the strength of *karma* as a source for moral responsibility also dissolves. The past is erased, but so too is the future. Finally, Stone's comment to the effect that the medieval Tendai texts cited above must be read in a strictly ontological fashion strikes me as rather naïve, given Stone's own frequent warnings about over-intellectualizing the doctrine of original enlightenment. Can the ontological be so easily detached from the moral?

The task of a truly Critical Buddhism in this case is to work out, by looking critically at the traditions, a version of *karma* that may best fit with the most significant Buddhist ideas and ethical teachings. The first stage in this task is to look to the various ways that the doctrine has been used within Buddhist societies, past and present, particularly those cases where *karma* has been used to explain or justify violence, warfare, or—most frequently and subtly—social discrimination.[108] In particular, the main focus should be on the usages, teachings, and interpretations

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[106] Melford Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes* (Berkeley, 1982 [1970]), p. 69.

[107] Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, pp. 218–19.

[108] Stone ("Some Reflections," p. 184) provides a few generalized historical examples of the various ways *karma* has been used as a means of justification for social and gender inequality across Asian countries, while Steven Collins (*Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities* [Cambridge, 1998]) gives a more detailed analysis of such within premodern South Asian Buddhism.

of *karma* in modern societies, where ideological components become more recognizable and pertinent to our present situation. The second stage—making positive and critical proposals—is more difficult, but equally crucial. Hakamaya's work on Dōgen's understanding of *karma* in terms of the *jinshininga* fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō* is one important step in this direction; but Hakamaya's criticism may be missing the main target, namely, not *hongaku* or "eternal mind and perishable phenomena" but *karma* itself. A broader understanding of Buddhist criticism may help to provide an understanding of *karma* that neither denies its historical usages nor runs up against teachings of *pratītya-samutpāda*, emptiness, and compassion.

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Chapter 3
Problems in Modern Zen Thought

> The doctrine of ascetic aestheticism is not so fundamental as that of Zen aestheticism. Art impulses are more primitive or more innate than those of morality. The appeal of art goes more directly into human nature. Morality is regulative, art is creative. One is an imposition from without, the other is an irrepressible expression from within. Zen finds its inevitable association with art not with morality.
>
> D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, p. 27

Turning back to twentieth-century Japan, we can see the continuance of *hongaku* inspirations in modernist readings of Zen—particularly those that emphasize enlightenment as a form of non-conceptual, aesthetic, or "pure" experience. In an essay entitled "A Theory of Oriental Aesthetics: A Prolegomenon," Kenneth Inada sets out to centralize aesthetics as the legitimate and true center of Asian thought and culture. He goes so far as to suggest that "The heights of cultural achievement in many respects reflect directly on the profundity of a philosophy of life based on the aesthetic nature of things." Inada claims to redress the balance against the view that aesthetics is inferior to philosophical or religious thought, but he misses the fact that much of modern Western thought, extending from the Romantics through German Idealism, has a strong aesthetic flavor. Moreover, the notion of aesthetics he presents is highly simplified as a kind of unitive, intuition-based monism.[1] Similarly, F.C.S. Northrop, in his classic comparative study *The Meeting of East and West* (1946), lionized the Japanese-"Oriental" apprehension of "the undifferentiated continuum in and through the immediately apprehended differentiated continuum"—in other words, the supposed religio-aesthetic mode of experiencing peculiar to the East.[2] For Richard Pilgrim, this amounts to a distinctively Eastern—and more particularly Japanese—appreciation of direct experience not only of the various objects of the world, however seemingly small and insignificant, but of the greater "sacred unity that empowers and is the ground for everything."[3] In other words: "Time, space, and the world of differentiated things are not discrete, frozen entities but constitute an immediately experienced

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[1] Kenneth Inada, "A Theory of Oriental Aesthetics: A Prolegomenon," *Philosophy East and West*, 47/1 (1997): p. 117. See also Hori Ichirō et al. (eds), *Japanese Religion: A Survey by the Agency for Cultural Affairs* (New York, 1972), p. 66.

[2] F.C.S. Northop, *The Meeting of East and West* (New York, 1946), pp. 315–58, 394–404.

[3] Richard Pilgrim, "Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic Tradition in Japan," in Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (ed.), *Art, Creativity, and the Sacred* (New York, 1996), p. 138.

continuum rich with the fullness of Being."[4] In terms of artistic creation, as well as apprehension and knowledge in a more general sense including the religious one, the discrete objects or particularities are occurences of the larger flow of what Western metaphysics calls "Being." Taking this idea in a more specific doctrinal direction, Inada reports:

> To a Buddhist, the very terms *empirical* and *rational* are subject to come under strong indictment. To elaborate, the Buddha's insightful perception told him that the initial passionate nature (*tṛṣṇā*) relies on the dichotomy created between the perceiver and the perceived, and consequently attaches to the dichotomized elements of the passions themselves … The epistemic consequence of this phenomenon is the alleged postulation of the concept of a self (*ātman*) in perception, which in turn is the basis for continued suffering. The profound instruction of the Buddha, however, turned our attention to the fluid, unimpeded, non-static nature of experience, pointing to the pure, unclouded nature of existence (*Dharma*) otherwise known as nirvana.[5]

Such interpretations of "Eastern thought" in general and the Japanese Buddhist tradition more specifically fall squarely within the sights of Ichikawa Hakugen and Critical Buddhism. Their reasons for critique hardly need rehashing here, as they are intrinsically tied into the more general critique of essentialism/*dhātu-vāda* or topicalist thinking discussed above. What makes the aesthetic element of specific interest is how commonly it has been employed as an explanatory paradigm for modern interpretations of Zen, in particular. Moreover, this aesthetic vision has direct implications in realms of knowledge and practice. According to D.T. Suzuki: "Buddhism does not try to find meaning outside of life, for living itself is meaning. Meaning is not added to life from the outside … How to live, however, is an art … We are each and all born artists. We are creators of the *myō*."[6] These words could have been taken from the pages of modern Western thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) or Michel Foucault (1926–1984).

Inada begins his analysis by denying the relevance of terms such as "empirical" and "rational." In the process, he explicitly conflates Buddhist and Daoist thought—"[f]or all intents and purposes, we may group emptiness and nothingness together as depicting nonbeing,"[7]—and contrasts these two "philosophies of process or becoming" with traditional Western (Platonic-Christian) philosophies of being. Inada also cites Nāgārjuna, who, he claims, "affirmed the coexistent and co-evolving nature of the conventional and nonconventional (ignorant and enlightened or limited and unlimited) nature of things. [Nāgārjuna] clearly stated: 'Without relying on everyday common practices (i.e., relative truths), the absolute truth of

4 Ibid., p. 139.

5 Inada, "Oriental Aesthetics," p. 118.

6 D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton, 1970), p. 170.

7 Inada, "Oriental Aesthetics," p. 120.

existence, nirvana, cannot be attained'."[8] And yet, in the succeeding paragraph, Inada asserts that "the empirical and rational functions are quite necessary for the realization of truth in the penetrating sense (*prajña*), that is, one that collapses both functions in the emptiness of things (*sunyata*)."[9] Moreover, the Sino-Japanese term for emptiness—*kong/kū*—grew, as Pilgrim correctly notes, out of early Indian Buddhist notions of the importance of realizing the equiprimordiality of all things (*pratītya-samutpāda*), Inada's attempts to conflate *kū* and *mu* notwithstanding.[10]

In the work of the Kyoto School philosophers, we see similar tensions between the rational and the aesthetic. Robert Carter elaborates Nishida's concept of nothingness in terms of a "poetry of Self-transformation," suggesting that to speak of nothingness is inevitably to transform philosophy into poetry.[11] By virtue of the transformative power of nothingness, "poetry becomes a way of living, of acting, of viewing all things as the cosmos."[12] The longing to conflate philosophy and poetry has deep roots in the Western tradition, surviving Plato's attempted separation of the two realms. Aristotle claimed poetry a more useful tool than history in coming to know truth, and this notion re-emerged in the late Renaissance with Vico, who passed it down to Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), the Romantics and Friedrich von Schelling (1755–1854), and through them to Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the neo-Marxists of the Frankfurt School. This sentiment is also reminiscent of the language of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), whose later works illuminate the fact "that the world exists in a more absolute and nonpragmatic sense … In and through the work of art, with its disinterestedly creative yet dependent relationship to wood, stone, or pigment, with its total presentness in yet also out of historical time, the world *weltet* … And it is just this mode of existentiality which turns out to be fundamental."[13] The question raised by Tanabe Hajime, one that would be echoed decades later by Matsumoto and Hakamaya, is whether there can in fact be a form of aesthetic experience that is non-totalizing, and which does not thereby fall into the trap of solipsism. "We are, we see and we act from the center of the world, as though from the center of an empty circle, as though an expression of the self-determination of nothingness itself."[14] Is this the true meaning of Zen "centering"—acting as though one were the center of the universe? Carter, with Suzukian gusto, claims that Nishida's sense of religious awareness transcends the merely ethical in the way that a musical virtuoso's performance is of a different order than that of an amateur who follows rules and a method. Ethical virtuosity is thus "akin to *kokoro*, the non-calculating welling up of spontaneous artistic feeling

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8 Ibid., p. 120.

9 Ibid.

10 Pilgrim, "Foundations," p. 145.

11 Robert Carter, *The Nothingness Beyond God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nishida Kitarō* (St. Paul, 1997), p. 89.

12 Ibid., p. 90.

13 George Steiner, *Martin Heidegger* (Chicago, 1991), p. 133.

14 Carter, *Nothingness Beyond God*, p. 127.

and enactment, expressed and given for no other reason than that, at least for this moment, it is one's nature, one's interpretive gestalt."[15] However well this may describe the situation of artistic virtuosity, the parallel with ethical spontaneity is not so clear. In the case of ethics, the situation is more interpersonal: right action often emerges in face-to-face encounters with individual beings, not with the plurality of an audience expecting a performance.

This sort of nondiscriminating intuitionism is also reflected strongly in the following remarks by Ishihara Shummyō, Sōtō Zen priest and president of the Buddhist magazine *Daihōrin*:

> Zen is very particular about the need not to stop one's mind. As soon as flintstone is struck, a spark bursts forth. There is not even the most momentary lapse of time between these two events. If ordered to face right, one simply faces right as quickly as a flash of lightning. This is proof that one's mind has not stopped. I believe that if one is called upon to die, one should not be the least bit agitated. On the contrary, one should be in a realm where something called "oneself" does not intrude even slightly. Such a realm is no different from that derived from the practice of Zen.[16]

The appeal to art or aesthetics among scholars of Japanese culture and religion—Zen, in particular—invariably involves an appeal to intuition and an implicit critique of abstract thinking and rational thought. A number of writers have tried to show that this non-rational approach to existence is distinctively Japanese. Perhaps the most significant and influential of these was, once again, Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), whose particular version of *kokugaku* was based on precisely such a direct, nonrational, poetic, intuitive understanding or apprehension of reality. "The nativist claim to the status of a hermeneutic lay in its rejection of abstract reason and principle (*ri*) and its devaluation of written language (Chinese) for the immediacy of speech"[17]—more specifically, the kind of speech associated with poetry. D.T. Suzuki speaks in numerous writings about the "intuitive nature" that "is a pronounced characteristic of Zen," while acknowledging its pre-Zen existence in the "pure and clear spirit" of the Japanese.[18] Similarly, for Kyoto School thinker Abe Masao, this extends beyond Zen and Buddhism to become a cultural or ethnic characteristic, and one that is connected to the syncretistic element in Japanese history:

> A Japanese appreciates synthesis rather than analysis, harmony more than logical consistency. This character of the Japanese people is also related to another of

15 Ibid., p. 146.

16 Quoted in Brian Victoria, *Zen at War* (New York, 1997), pp. 102–3.

17 H.D. Harootunian, *Things Seen and Unseen: Discourse and Ideology in Tokugawa Nativism* (Chicago and London, 1988), p. 329.

18 Quoted in Victoria, *Zen War Stories*, p. 120.

> their characteristics. Whereas the Japanese are always eager to introduce foreign cultures, they carefully maintain the traditional one and gradually create a new form of culture through synthesis.[19]

Though this "characteristic" has, from the time of Norinaga, usually been taken positively, it has also sometimes been understood as a flaw or problem. Nakamura Hajime, for one, lamented the "Japanese inclination" to emphasize "particular facts and specific phases" at the expense of theory, such that what results is a "contempt of rational thinking and the worship of controlled intuitionism and activism.[20] Nakamura's solution to this problem is also instructive: "In order not to repeat the same failure, we ought from now on to learn to seek universal 'reason' through specific 'facts'."[21] In terms of a Buddhist response to this matter, a turn to an idealized "universal reason" would only make matters worse. This mistake haunts the critical work of Critical Buddhism. Even Abe admits that we should not "overlook that in the characteristics just described there exists an underlying laxity in critical thinking and an easy obedience to authority."[22] Yukawa Hideki goes much further to argue, against Abe's claims of careful syncretism: "[t]he unconscious recognition of their own defect in abstraction seems to drive the Japanese to the uncritical adoption of the religious and philosophical systems brought in from outside."[23]

On the other hand, against these readings of Japanese or Zen aestheticism, Miyamoto Shōsen counters that "the Japanese mind has been trained and developed, consciously and unconsciously—we may say, existentially—by the streams of Buddhist rationalistic ways of thinking."[24] Miyamoto goes on to introduce "one of the most important terms in Japanese Buddhist thought": *dōri*, indicating "rational," "reason," or "principle," derived from the Sino-Japanese characters *michi*/*dō* (Ch. *dao*) and *ri* (Ch. *li*).[25] Furthermore, Marxist writers such as Tosaka Jun and Kozai Yoshishige (1901–1990) were quick to identify the political and ideological elements in this aesthetic interpretation of the Japanese spirit. In *Nippon ideorogiiron* (1935), Tosaka showed how culture posing as nature is in fact a product of a particular type of cultural hermeneutic. His argument will be treated in more detail below.

Karatani Kōjin, generally acknowledged as the *doyen* of contemporary Japanese cultural criticism, develops a broad critique of "aesthetics" within

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19 Abe Masao, *Zen and Western Thought* (Honolulu, 1985), p. 223.

20 Nakamura Hajime, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (Honolulu, 1964), p. 400.

21 Ibid.

22 Abe Masao, *Zen and Comparative Studies* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 223.

23 Yukawa Hideki, "Modern Trends of Western Civilization and Cultural Peculiarities in Japan," in Charles A. Moore (ed.), *The Japanese Mind* (Honolulu, 1982), p. 547.

24 Miyamoto Shōsen, "The Relation of Philosophical Theory to Practical Affairs in Japan," in Charles A. Moore (ed.), *The Japanese Mind* (Honolulu, 1982), p. 61.

25 Ibid.

modern Japanese thought. Indeed, from Karatani's perspective, much of the "collaboration" of writers and intellectuals with wartime militarism and "imperial way fascism" can be attributed to this proclivity towards aesthetics as a generic principle or foundation for thought and culture. This critique runs throughout Karatani's writings, but is most concisely expressed in his essays on the "Overcoming Modernity" (*kindai no chōkoku*) symposium of 1942, in which he marshals evidence against Nishida and the Kyoto School, as well as the Japanese Romantic School (Nihon Roman-ha)[26] and members of the *Bungakkai* (Literary World) group such as Kobayashi Hideo, each of which, Karatani argues, relied upon an interpretation of aesthetics that aligned with the hegemonic nationalistic ideology. It bears noting that Karatani simultaneously problematizes the standard view of the Overcoming Modernity symposium by emphasizing that, "while Kobayashi Hideo of *Bungakkai* was present, neither Yasuda Yojūrō of the Romantics nor Nishida Kitarō of the Kyoto School was involved."[27]

In opposition to these figures, Karatani cites the work of Tosaka Jun as well as the Burai-ha writer Sakaguchi Ango (1906–1955), whose 1942 essay "Nihon bunka shikan" (A Personal View of Japanese Culture) was perhaps the first substantial critique of Japanism from a literary perspective.[28] Karatani defines aesthetics as "that which surmounts and unifies actual contradictions at an imaginary level." In this sense, then, aesthetics is much more than simply a way of speaking about art and beauty; it is rather a mode of discourse that seeks to establish a reformed mode of existence or "sensibility"—an understanding that dates back to Romantic writers such as Friedrich Schiller, and finds expression within German Idealism following Hegel. This is not to say that Karatani's definition is equivalent to that of Schiller of Hegel, but rather that, like theirs, it looks to the original meaning of the Greek root *aisthēsis*, i.e., "perception."[29] For Karatani, German Idealism is essentially an aesthetics, and so, by genealogical extension, is (mainstream) modern Japanese "thought." Thus, the attempt to "overcome modernity" inevitably ended in failure, since it is impossible to overcome the large-scale social contradictions and tensions of modernity by appealing to an abstract ideal of "culture," however totalizing. In contrast, both Tosaka and Ango—albeit in very different ways—present arguments for the critique of aesthetics, and by extension, culture itself, thereby opening up new conditions of "possibility." Unfortunately, in Karatani's eyes, these alternative possibilities were not subsequently developed in the postwar period. Indeed, while under the postwar Occupation outward

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[26] The movement's mouthpiece was the journal *Nihon Roman-ha*, which ran from 1935 to 1938.

[27] Karatani Kōjin, "Overcoming Modernity," in Richard Calichman (ed.), *Contemporary Japanese Thought* (New York, 2005), p. 101.

[28] See Sakaguchi Ango, "Nihon bunka shikan," in *Sakaguchi Ango* (Tokyo, 1991), pp. 167–212.

[29] See Richard Calichman, "Introduction," in Richard Calichman (ed.), *Contemporary Japanese Thought* (New York, 2005), p. 27.

expressions of nationalism became unacceptable, over the following decades elements of prewar and wartime Japanism were often resurrected and integrated into prevailing Western assumptions about "the Japanese mind" or "the oriental essence"— frequently under the guise of culture and aesthetics.[30]

Two Sanskrit terms, *prajñā*[31] *and vijñana*,[32] have long been utilized in Buddhist metaphysics to explore the relation of intuition to reason or discursive understanding. *Vijñana* (Ch. *shi*; Jp. *shiki*), is one of the Five Aggregates (Sk. *skandha*; Ch. *yun*; Jp. *un*)—the components or constituents of all intelligent beings—and is frequently translated as "consciousness" or, more broadly, the mental faculty in regard to perception, cognition, and experience. *Prajñā*, on the other hand, defined as "wisdom, cognitive acuity, know-how," is included as one of the six *pāramitā*—or "perfections" as means to reach *nirvāṇa*—that became central to the Mahāyāna understanding of awakening. There are thought to be three types of *prajñā*:

1. *prajñā* of languages;
2. *prajñā* of contemplative illumination;
3. *prajñā* of the characteristics of actuality.

The third is the highest form of wisdom and is essentially the wisdom of a Buddha or awakened one. Although there is no universal agreement as to the precise relation between the two terms, one prevalent interpretation of their relation is that ultimately *prajñā* goes beyond *vijñāna*. According to D.T. Suzuki—here as elsewhere the most influential if not the most circumspect interpreter of Buddhism for the West—*Vijñana* cannot work without having *prajña* behind it:

> Mere aggregates have no significance, and this is why in Buddhist philosophy all *dharmas* (elements), when they are regarded as individual existences, are declared to have no *atman*. The *atman* is a unifying principle, and the idea is that, as long as all *dharmas* are conceived without any reference to that which unifies them, they are just disconnected parts, that is, they are non-existent. *Prajña* is needed to make them coherent, articulate, significant … *Vijñana* without *prajña* kills; it works for individualization, and, by making each individual disconnected with

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[30] See John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York, 1999), pp. 79–80; Harootunian, *Things Seen*, p. 437; Peter Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (New York, 1986), p. 5; Robert Bellah, "Japan's Cultural Identity: Some Reflections on the Work of Watsuji Tetsuro," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 24/4 (1965): pp. 573–94.

[31] Another explanation of the term suggests "wisdom, as opposed to phenomenal knowledge"; also: "The mental function of discriminating the relative and the absolute, cutting off doubt. The mental function of penetrating the relative and the absolute" (C. Muller, DDB, s.v. "prajñā").

[32] *Vijñāna* is also the third of the 12 aspects of *pratītya-samutpāda*.

> others, *vijñana* makes them all impermanent and subject to the law of karma. It is by *prajña* that all *dharmas* are observable from a unitive point-of-view and acquire a new life and significance.[33]

But why, we might ask Suzuki, this desire for "significance"—why replace *atman* with something that seems like *atman* under another name? While Suzuki allows that "*prajña*-intuition and *vijñana*-intuition are equally important and indispensable in the establishment of a synthetic philosophy," it is clear which one he thinks should hold precedence. As a result, despite Buddhist teachings of impermanence and equiprimordiality, he presents what amounts to a monistic vision of knowledge and truth. It is important to note that while this critique of Suzuki might appear simply a "Western" perspective—i.e., one based on Western conceptions of logic and rationality—it is also a critique that has precedent within mainstream Buddhist traditions, as Dale Wright and others have shown.

Another example of an argument similar to Suzuki's may be found in a recent article by the well-known American Zen teacher Bernie Glassman. After excusing the militarism and anti-Semitism of Yasutani Haku'un, who has come under fire from Brian Victoria and others, Glassman argues:

> If your definition of enlightenment is that there's no nationalism, or militarism, or bigotry in the state of enlightenment, you better change your definition of enlightenment. For the state of enlightenment is *maha*, the circle with no inside and no outside, not even a circle, just pulsating of life everywhere.[34]

In response, Vishvapavi, editor of *Dharma Life*, argues that while "[t]o some, such sentiments will seem profound … I think they are transcendental platitudes, confusion raised to the level of metaphysics … What is missing is ethics, and Glassman's inclusivity seems to me to culminate in moral failure."[35] While Vishvapani, along with Victoria, is right to be dismissive of Glassman's "transcendental platitudes" offered in the name of Buddhism, he fails to note that Glassman is hardly the first to make such claims for the nature of enlightenment. Perhaps the problem is not with the platitudinousness of such antinomian rhetoric but the fact that it can be doctrinally sustained using elements within Buddhist (especially Chan/Zen) tradition itself. Stuart Lachs raises an important question related to this issue in his attempt to understand the many cases of abuse of authority within both American and Japanese Zen. Lachs asks whether the problem might have something to do with:

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[33] D.T. Suzuki, "Reason and Intuition in Buddhist Philosophy," in Charles Moore (ed.), *The Japanese Mind* (Honolulu, 1982), pp. 66–7.

[34] Bernie Glassman, "Bernie Glassman Responds," *Tricycle*, 9/1 (1999): p. 74.

[35] Vishvapani, "Zen: A Rude Awakening," *Dharma Life* (Winter 2000): p. 36.

> the description and view of enlightenment as static, in the sense of seeing only what is, rather than a more dynamic view which also involves that which functions? A view of Buddhist attainment that also focuses on function, rather than objectifying an experience, would also place primary emphasis on context and connection, i.e., relationships with other people and society as a whole.[36]

For support, Lachs cites Victor Hori's remarks to the effect that, within the Rinzai Zen curriculum, *kenshō* is best understood as a verb—that is, "something that one does [rather than] something that one has."[37] Interestingly, the same might be said about Buddha-nature as derived by Chinese Buddhists from the earlier Indian term *buddhatva* or "buddhahood"—which is of course an accomplishment or "path," and not an ontological ground or essence.

Can the highly aesthetic reading of Zen proffered by Suzuki and other Zen modernists be fruitfully conceived, and criticized, as variations on the philosophical question of "knowledge by acquaintance" versus "knowledge by description"? Knowledge of "the way the world is" is generally given high priority within forms of early Buddhism; indeed, destruction of ignorance (Sk. *avidyā*) is in most readings *the* key to enlightenment or awakening in early Buddhism, and leads some scholars to claim that Buddhism is at root a gnostic soteriology. Yet there are, as we have seen, numerous ways of categorizing and prioritizing different sorts of knowledge. Buddhist sources seem to allow that it is possible, for example, to have a superficial understanding of the truth of impermanence or emptiness without becoming thereby "awakened" to these truths.[38] Using terms favored by modern epistemology, it would appear that the crucial difference lies in the distinction between first-hand or immediate knowledge—knowledge by acquaintance ("to know p")—and second-hand or derivative knowledge—knowledge by description ("to know *of* p"). Whereas some European languages allow for this distinction in having two separate words for "to know"—e.g., Fr. *savoir* and *connaître*; Gr. *wissen* and *kennen*[39]—English uses a single term to describe both. In the ancient Indian epistemological traditions out of which Buddhism was born, knowledge by perception (Sk. *pratyakṣa*) is distinct from other forms of knowledge, such as knowledge through inference (Sk. *anumāna*) or knowledge through testimony (Sk. *śabda*). In both Indian and Western thought, including the major religious

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[36] Stuart Lachs, "Coming Down from the Zen Clouds: A Critique of the Current State of American Zen." (Online, 1994). Available at: www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/ComingDownfromtheZenClouds.htm [accessed November 14, 2010], p. 5.

[37] Ibid., p. 8, n.22.

[38] See, e.g., Nāgārjuna, *Yuktisastikārikā*, in Christian Lindtner (ed.), *Nāgārjuniana* (Delhi, 1982), section 41; *Theragāthā: Poems of Early Buddhist Monks* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 187–8.

[39] This distinction can also be found in the Japanese verbs *shiru* (knowledge by acquaintance) and *wakaru* (discriminative understanding).

traditions, knowledge by acquaintance generally holds epistemic primacy largely "because it is a foundational form upon which a string of knowledge by description can be established."[40] As Richard King notes: "Perception is considered by most schools to be the *pramāna* par excellence … For instance in the case of the Nyāya school, inferential knowledge (*anumāna*) follows on perceptual knowledge and lacks its immediacy (*aporoksatva*)."[41] Here perceptual knowledge comes close to the classical Indian notion of *darśana*—a vision or direct observation. This term was later used to refer to one of the six orthodox philosophical schools or systems, and thus came to connote something more along the lines of "interpretation" or "viewpoint." And of course, it would also become central to *bhakti* Hinduism. It would appear, then, that the priority given to unitive over discriminative knowledge by Suzuki and sundry modern Zen interpreters has deep roots not only in Western thought but also within the Indian Buddhist tradition. The question is, is it truly Buddhist—in the Critical Buddhist sense of being not merely *compatible* but *supportive* of the principles of the doctrine of *pratītya-samutpāda* and the ethic of compassion? What might be some of the weaknesses or problems of such an understanding?

In the past century serious doubts have been raised as to the very possibility of knowledge by acquaintance. Such doubts usually rely on the seeming impossibility to verify whether any perception is pristine in the sense of being an unmediated exposure to the way things really are. This line of critique can be traced in modern philosophy back to Kant, if not to ancient skeptics of East and West long before him. One modern version suggests that what is considered to be knowledge by acquaintance is simply perception or sensation itself, and that such "raw feelings" cannot be classified as a form of knowledge, which requires some concept of truth and falsity. Early Buddhists were critical of the "common sense realism" of the Nyāya-Vaisesika school, in which it was taught that everyday objects in the world exist independent of our minds—in themselves—and yet can be apprehended as they really are. Both Dignāga (480–540 CE) and Dharmakīrti (600–660 CE) were wary of this idea, not only because of the Buddhist teachings of emptiness and impermanence, but also because it was assumed that the bare perceptions of ordinary people are hopelessly distorted by mental activity, and thus only one who has reached awakening, or is close to it, can achieve the undistorted knowledge of the way things are.[42] To Dharmakīrti is often attributed the remark: "reason itself is ignorance." However, as Richard Hayes notes, the term Dharmakīrti employs here, *vikalpa*, does not in fact imply "reason" or "logic," but rather "imagination

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[40] David Burton, *Buddhism, Knowledge and Liberation: A Philosophical Study* (Aldershot, 2004), p. 33.

[41] Richard King, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought* (Edinburgh, 1999), p. 147.

[42] See A.C. Klein, *Knowledge and Liberation: Tibetan Buddhist Epistemology in Support of Transformative Religious Experience* (Ithaca, 1998), p. 91; King, *Indian Philosophy*, pp. 178–9.

that is not grounded in some way in *pratyakṣa* (sense experience)."[43] As such, criticism turns away from "discursive knowledge" or "logic" and points rather towards unfounded or extravagant claims about direct perception.

In the eyes of Critical Buddhism, however, all of this might be holding on to one topical illusion—the idea of omniscience—in order to combat another (although the notion of a Buddha's omniscience [*sarvākarā-jñatā*], with slight variations, has clear precedence within both the Mahāyāna[44] and Theravāda).[45] Indeed, for Kant and much of the Western epistemological tradition that followed in his wake, the idea is simply that our human faculties cannot quite "reach" reality itself. Mainstream Western philosophy did not make the further conclusion that perhaps there is no "reality in itself" to be reached or not reached, or that, given the impossibility of coming to any kind of conclusion about the matter, it might be more fruitfully shunted aside. Inspired by the so-called "linguistic turn," these further steps have been taken more recently in the Anglo-American philosophical tradition by philosophers such as Nelson Goodman (1906–1998), Donald Davidson (1917–2003), and Richard Rorty (1931–2007). A few Japanese writers have offered a similar critique, from as far back as Fujiwara no Shunzei (1114–1204) to contemporary critic Karatani Kōjin. The former claims that, without poetry, one could not know the color or scent of blossoms—in other words, that experience of the world relies at least partly upon our concepts and metaphors.[46] Indeed, this is a form of critique that can also be developed along traditional Buddhist lines, using, in particular, what might be called the Buddhist anti-realist tradition found in the work of Nāgārjuna and continued through the Sino-Japanese heritage of Mādhyamika and Chan/Zen. A truly Critical Buddhism must rely on a more fully developed hermeneutic, while remaining engaged with modern ethical and social concerns.

Having now examined some specific cases of topicalist interpretations of modern Zen, and having lifted up the possibility of a (Critical) Buddhist critique of the very idea of knowledge by acquaintance, which seems to be the root of these topical interpretations, let us now turn to the critique of the Kyoto School provided by Hakamaya in the first section of his *Critical Buddhism* (*Hihan bukkyō*, 1990). Hakamaya pinpoints in particular the centrality of *basho* (Lt. *topos*) in Nishida-philosophy and argues that this extension of the distinctly non-Buddhist *hongaku shisō* reveals a capitulation to topicalism, a surrender which in turn had something to do with Nishida's own "nationalism." In Nishida's work, especially

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43 Richard Hayes, *buddha-l* discussion list, 19 April 2004 (buddha-l@listserv.louisville.edu [accessed April 19, 2004]).

44 See Paul Griffiths, *On Being Buddha: The Classical Doctrine of Buddhahood* (Albany, 1994), pp. 170–72.

45 *Majjhima Nikāya: The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, Bhikku Ñanamoli and Bhikku Bodhi (trs) (Boston: Wisdom, 1995), pp. 1273, 1292.

46 For a Western equivalent, see the 9th *Duinese Elegie* of Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926).

the early writings, *basho* indicates the significance of pure experience before and beyond the intellect, and thus, before and beyond ethics or politics. Hakamaya hits upon several areas of great concern to the study of Nishida and Kyoto School philosophy, yet his critique is not sufficiently developed, remaining largely at the level of rhetoric. Remarkably, the 40-page chapter entitled "A Critique of the Kyoto School"[47] does not even mention Nishida or the Kyoto School until its 25th page, after a long digression into German Idealism, among other matters. In order to understand and develop a more adequate critique of *basho*, we must begin with an analysis of pure experience as a more specific, modern extension of some of the trends and ideas discussed above.

In *Bukkyōsha no sensō sekinin*, his 1970 work on the war responsibility of Japanese Buddhists, Ichikawa Hakugen remarks on the Zen "seeing the universal in the particular," an idea that was transplanted in the modern Japanese context onto the relationship between households and the Emperor, which became connected as an organism and its cells. Combined with Mahāyāna notions like "discrimination is equality," the employment and actualization of such organic metaphors leads to blithe acceptance and even support of fascist or imperialist systems, which rely upon similar metaphors to sustain absolute control over their subjects, part of the process German critic Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) called the "aestheticization of the political." Ichikawa implicates Suzuki's logic of *soku-hi* (*soku-hi no ronri*) as well as Nishida's logic of "absolutely contradictory self-identity" (*zettai mujunteki jikodōitsu*) in the collapsing of Zen and fascist ideals. Once again, Ichikawa's arguments align with those of Critical Buddhism as well as with contemporary Western scholars like Robert Sharf. In particular, the emphasis placed by Ichikawa on the importance of a "dynamic theoretical framework from which to confront actuality" contains the strongest basis for a constructive critical Buddhist analysis of topical thinking and its effects, though, as Christopher Ives notes, Ichikawa was unable to fully develop his own constructive proposals regarding "origin humanism" and "*śūnya*-anarchism-communism."[48]

Roots for a rejection of the relevance of history and social forces in favor of direct, unmediated experience through language itself can be found in the writings of Motoori Norinaga. Norinaga sought a "language without history" through which man, like his ancient forbears, could confront "the world of objects" in a direct and immediate fashion. "Here, too, is the meaning of *mono no aware* and its promise to close the distance between past and present in order to secure an empathic community, unbound by the constraints of history or social forms."[49] As noted above, Norinaga was led to criticize "foreign" cultural and religious imports, especially Confucian rationalism but also Buddhism, for their "noisy debates about good and evil, right and wrong"—debates that

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[47] "Kyōto gakuha hihan," in Hakamaya, *Hihanbukkyō* (Tokyo, 1990), pp. 47–92.

[48] Christopher Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen: Ichikawa Hakugen's Critique and Lingering Questions for Buddhist Ethics* (Honolulu, 2009), p. 166.

[49] Harootunian, *Things Seen*, p. 49.

had no place in the archaic and highly aesthetic way of Japan. According to Norinaga, the way of Japan "has had the same goal as poetry." Ironically, while Norinaga lumped Buddhism with Confucianism as being overly rational, Edo-period Confucianists frequently accused their Buddhist compatriots of fomenting irrational mysticism, a criticism which would in turn feed into both the early Meiji persecution of Buddhism and associated attempts at Buddhist reform. Despite Norinaga's rejection of Buddhism, modernist interpretations of Zen adopt many of his arguments and rhetorical tropes, particularly with respect to the notion of the possibility and significance of direct and immediate experience with reality, in the process of transcending not only society but language and history itself.

At the same time, the modernist vision of Zen based on the priority of pure experience echoes, *mutatis mutandis*, the conventional understanding of mysticism within the Western religions. "The center of mystical religion is the mystical experience, which at its highest development dominates the consciousness, excluding all awareness of words, nature, even of the mystic's own self."[50] While it is true that the language of Western mysticism is generally assertive of the fullness of union with the divine, as opposed to the espousal of emptiness by Zen thinkers, this distinction appears to matter little to the general expression of the mystical, unmediated, or pure experience of reality *as it really is*. This "mystical" reading of Zen has been criticized by a number of scholars, such as Robert Sharf and James Whitehall. Sharf notes that in modern Zen, the "heart" of Zen does not lie "in its ethical principles, its communal and ritual practices, or its doctrinal teachings, but rather in a private, veridical, often momentary 'state of consciousness'."[51] He goes on to trace the roots of such in the influence of modern Western thought, especially the work of American psychologist and philosopher William James (1842–1910). Sharf's explanation for the strength and necessity of such a revision of Zen in terms of experience is that it arose largely out of a defensive posture: with Zen "purified" as experience, it becomes safe from the intrusive and destructive forces of historical and scientific—not to mention social or ethical—criticism: "In privileging experience the Japanese, like their Western mentors, sought to naturalize the category 'religion'—if religious traditions were predicated upon an ineffable, noetic, mystical state of consciousness, then they could not be rejected as mere superstition, infantile wish-fulfillment, or collective hysteria."[52] Thus, the modern Zen turn towards experience is one that echoes the much earlier Chan turn towards "peace of mind," according to the argument of Ichikawa Hakugen; i.e., it is a reaction to pressure from outside forces. What makes the modern turn distinct,

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[50] "Religion," in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1986).

[51] Robert Sharf, "Whose Zen? Zen Nationalism Revisited," in James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo (eds), *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu, 1994), p. 45.

[52] Ibid.; see also David McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (New York, 2008).

however, is the fact that it also borrows from and reinforces modern (or modernist) Western understandings of the meaning of "religion."

James Whitehall suggests that such an understanding of Buddhism, and Zen in particular, can be explained by the "transcendental trap"—i.e., the idea that Buddhist enlightenment or awakening is at root a non-rational realization and one which, by extension, transcends or supersedes not only rational thought but morality and ethics as well.[53] In short, all is thrown into an overwhelming, mystical and highly affective or aesthetic experience of things as they truly are. While this experience is often characterized in cognitive terms, it is not to be construed as rational or discriminative. Whitehall criticizes such a view as being "un-Buddhist" in the sense that it does not appear to have much if any precedent in premodern Buddhism, but more importantly because the priority placed on ethics and moral conduct within all forms of Buddhist tradition seems to be neglected or radically demoted in emphasis.

To some extent, the critique offered by both Sharf and Whitehall is overgeneralized. While prevalent, this modern or modernist reading of Zen cannot be applied across the board. Indeed, since the Meiji Restoration there have been a number of reactions against such interpretations, arising both within and without traditional Buddhist institutions. Moreover, Sharf and Whitehall's critique raises the question of intentionality: were Zen and Buddhist thinkers really so aware of this reshaping or reconfiguring of Zen tradition? Studies by Ketelaar (*Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 1990), Snodgrass (*Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West*, 2003), and McMahan (*The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 2008) largely support the view that many Buddhist leaders and thinkers of the late Meiji and Taishō periods were engaged in a conscious attempt to present a "modern" form of Buddhism, out of a need not only to compete with the West, but also to reaffirm the significance and power of Buddhism *vis-à-vis* emerging State Shinto and the legacy of Edo-period Confucianist criticism of Buddhism as "degenerate" and "superstitious." And yet, it is important to note the significant variation of forms of Japanese Buddhist modernism, which reflects not only a diversity of opinions about the meaning of "modernity" but also sectarian differences. Not all Buddhist modernists were working out of the Zen traditions. Indeed, most of those involved in the Meiji Buddhist Enlightenment (*bukkyō keimō*) and New Buddhist (*shin bukkyō*) movements had some affiliation with the Pure Land (especially Shin) sects.

Before turning towards a critique of Nishida Kitarō's *basho* and pure experience, let us examine some of the ways in which Buddhist tradition has dealt with what we might refer to as mystical awareness. There is a long tradition of skepticism within Buddhism that suggests that the character of "things in themselves" cannot be known, and that truly awakened followers of the Dharma realize this and give up their attachment to such an idea. On the other hand,

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[53] James Whitehall, "Buddhism and Virtues," in Damien Keown (ed.), *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics* (Richmond, 2000), p. 21; also see Burton, *Buddhism, Knowledge and Liberation*, p. 76.

an alternative understanding suggests that such a reality behind or beyond the phenomenal world can indeed be known or experienced, if only by awakened beings (primarily buddhas, but possibly *arhat*s or bodhisattvas). Indeed, this latter understanding is probably the more common of the two. David Burton has referred to this line of thinking as "skepticism with a mystical twist," in that it claims that while "things in themselves" are veiled from ordinary minds, they are not in fact totally unknowable—though, it is often adduced, they are still ineffable, due to the dualistic and falsifying character of language.[54]

The main source of such ideas appears to be the Yogācāra tradition, although one can certainly find precedents in the Mādhayamika as well, and even within the writings of Nāgārjuna himself. Although Yogācāra is frequently read by modern buddhologists as a form of ontological idealism, positing the mind-as-flow-of-consciousness as the sole reality, some, such as Harris and Kochmutton, have indicated that Yogācāra writers sometimes suggest that there is a reality "out there"—the only problem being that it is *indescribable* (at least, by unawakened beings).[55] One can find this line of thought in the writings of Asanga (c. 300–370 CE), Vasubandhu (c. fourth century CE), and the third century CE *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra*—particularly as understood by its Tibetan interpreters.[56] Asanga asserts that "Having discerned that [objects that are] different from consciousness do not exist, one thus understands the non-existence of consciousness. Having understood the non-existence of duality, the wise man abides in the sphere of reality (*dharmadhātu*) which is not the domain of that [duality]."[57] We might also cite lines from the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, in which reality (*tattva*)[58] is said to be an ultimate beyond concepts and words, and "not dependent on another."[59] One result of this interpretation is that the truth about reality cannot be taught, but must be directly experienced. Whether or not the above implies that Yogācāra and Mādhyamika were actually saying the same thing—a notion appealing to syncretists wishing to resolve the antagonism between these two foundational Buddhist schools[60]—such ideas have clear

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54 Burton, *Buddhism, Knowledge and Liberation*, p. 130.

55 See Ian Harris, *The Continuity of Mādhyamika and Yogācāra in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism* (Leiden, 1991), p. 83; T. Kochmutton, *A Buddhist Doctrine of Experience* (Delhi, 1982), p. 213.

56 See Asanga, *Bodhisattvabhūmi-sūtra* (Patna, 1996); Vasubandhu Asanga, *Madhyānta-vibhāga-bhāsya*, in Stefan Anacker (ed.), *Seven Works of Vasubandhu: The Buddhist Psychological Doctor* (Delhi, 1998); John Powers, *Wisdom of Buddha: The Saṃdhinirmocana Mahāyāna Sutra* (Berkeley, 1995).

57 Quoted in Burton, *Buddhism, Knowledge and Liberation*, p. 132.

58 Sk. *tatha* (Jp. *nyonyo* or *shinnyo*), translated by Charles Muller (DDB) as "suchness," "just as it is-ness," or "the disclosedness of something" (DDB, s.v. "*tatha*").

59 MMK §18, 9.

60 See, e.g., Stefan Anacker, *Seven Works of Vasubandhu: The Buddhist Psychological Doctor* (Delhi, 1998), pp. 184–5.

antecedents in Sino-Japanese Huayan/Kegon, Tiantai/Tendai, and Chan/Zen, and within modern Zen in particular. Moreover, the doctrine of no-mind (Jp. *mushin*), which developed particularly within Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen, is clearly correlated with the notion of pure awareness. Of all the above-mentioned doctrines, this is no doubt the one most heavily invoked in modern Zen, both in Japan and in the West—a situation due in large part, once again, to the work of D.T. Suzuki. According to the doctrine of no-mind, once one has attained a certain stage of Zen training, one becomes fully "in the moment," erasing subject-object distinctions and enabling one to act in a pure, spontaneous manner. In fact, acting in the condition of no-mind allows one to transcend all dualisms, including the false distinctions of life and death and good and evil.[61] In this interpretation, a level of transcendence—or transcendence-in-immanence[62]—is assumed or applied to Buddhist soteriology. In fact, rather than understanding awakening in terms of apprehension of the three marks of existence, these are supplanted by a direct, non-conceptual insight into a mysterious reality that transcends all conditions, causes, and interdependent relations—and is, by the paradoxical definition, "beyond words and letters."

Indeed, in addition to the commonly-held Buddhist understanding of *nirvāṇa*/*nibbāna* as the psychological state of an awakened being characterized by the extinguishing of craving (Sk. *tṛṣnā*, Jp. *katsu*, lit. thirst) and ignorance (Sk. *avidyā*, Jp. *mumyō*), another understanding of *nirvāṇa*/*nibbāna* emphasizes that it is something known—an object of consciousness. Whether such an "alternative" understanding can be traced back to the "original" teachings of Buddhism is beside the point. While it can be argued that discussion of this issue in the Pali texts generally revolves around the matter of the non-conceptual fourth *dhyāna*—which may be seen to be only a temporary and provisional state to be ultimately relinquished in favor of the first *dhyāna*, which may be conceptual—it is true that other texts from the Pali canon claim that "*nibbāna* is a 'deathless' (*amata*) reality that transcends the conditioned world of transitory, time-bound entities. It is timeless. It is described metaphorically as a place quite apart from the impermanent world. That is, it is transcendent (*lokuttara*). It is a separate ontological realm … the Unconditioned Reality."[63] Moreover, this version of Buddhist awakening gained even stronger hold within the Mahāyāna.

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61 See Brian Victoria, "When God(s) and Buddhas Go to War" (unpublished manuscript, 2002), p. 17, for remarks on the role of no-mind and no-self in military Zen.

62 See Jacynthe Tremblay, *Nishida Kitaro: Le Jeu De L'individuel Et De L'universel* (Paris, 2000), pp. 137–46, for more on Nishida's concept of "transcendence-in-immanence."

63 Burton, *Buddhism, Knowledge and Liberation*, p. 143; see also Steven Collins, *Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 188, and Paul Williams, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (London, 2000), pp. 50–52.

The psychological and religious appeal of such a non-conceptual realm is readily understandable. For one, it provides a strong sense of surety and solid ground, especially in contrast to the unstable and constantly changing conventional reality. This point alone would serve as a boost to those undertaking the Buddhist path, in what might be considered a functional parallel to the Christian Heaven, Islamic Paradise, or Amida's Pure Land of Bliss. Speaking pragmatically, if the cash-value of *karma* is to keep people in line, then the cash-value of this understanding of *nirvāṇa* is to keep them going. In addition, the appeal to authority by way of a privileged yet inexpressible experience adds a corollary dimension to this understanding, one that opens the door to power and the possibility of abuse. Yet, as with *karma*, we are still compelled to question the matter further, both in terms of its philosophical logic and in terms of its viability *vis-à-vis* other Buddhist goals.

In order to draw this issue into the modern context, let us turn to the writings of Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), founder of the Kyoto School (*Kyōto gakuha*), the most influential philosophical school of twentieth-century Japan. Though not affiliated with or grounded in religion *per se*, the philosophy developed by Nishida, Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962), and Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990) was deeply indebted to Buddhism, and to Zen in particular. Robert Sharf has argued that the Kyoto School effectively created a new form of Zen, a "pure Zen," based on the primacy of a kind of mystical experience ultimately beyond ethics, reason, and language. According to this Zen understanding, to experience things in this way is to know things "just as they are"—that is to say, beyond the fabrications of the mind. In Nishida's earliest work, *Zen no kenkyū* (An Inquiry into the Good, 1911) we can find the origin of a term that would later come to dominate Nishida's work: *basho*—usually translated as *topos*, locus or "place." Yet in this early work it is not *basho* but rather "pure experience" (*junsui keiken*) that plays the central role.

As many scholars have observed, early twentieth-century Western thinkers such as William James and Josiah Royce (1855–1916) clearly influenced Nishida's *Inquiry into the Good*. Among other things, this essay is often said to have brought about the end of the direct and uncritical import of Western philosophy characteristic of the Meiji period, thereby giving birth to a genuine Japanese philosophy. While Nishida later acknowledged that his *Inquiry into the Good* was too psychological and mystical, its fundamental insights regarding pure experience would have significant impact on twentieth-century philosophical readings of Zen, as well as on Nishida's later work.[64]

In *Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James writes of "pure experience" as a fundamental concept.[65]

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64 See Abe Masao, "Introduction," in Nishida Kitarō, *An Inquiry into the Good* (New Haven and London, 1987), p. xxi. See Tremblay, *Nishida Kitaro*, pp. 14–15, for a discussion of the various periods of Nishida's life and thought.

65 Dilworth has argued that Nishida's "world of human-historical existence is precisely the fluent world of consciousness described … positively in W. James's *Essays*

> It is as if there were in the human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call "something there," more deep and more general than any of the particular "senses" by which current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed.[66]

James discusses the root of all experience in terms of an "instantaneous field of present" in which all experience is "pure."[67] Important here is the element of a deep presence felt by the subject, which comes before cognition and ordinary perception. This includes a feeling of absorption, whereby normal subjectivity and even consciousness of activity is suspended. Here also we see a convergence between the mystical and aesthetic interpretations of religion, discussed above. "Artistic experiences are often 'pre-conceptual' in the sense that they are not mastered by a conceptualizing intellect. In a way, these experiences give the impression of unfolding themselves 'all alone', that is of taking place without any conscious effort from the part of the subject."[68]

Nishida did not follow exactly along the lines of James or fellow radical empiricists Ernst Mach (1838–1916), with his "critique of experience," or Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), with his emphasis on "immediate experience"; he saw their work as hopelessly flawed by inherent dualist and subjectivist assumptions.[69] And yet, Nishida's work clearly continues many of the same themes, which can be found in the metaphors and images used to describe the condition of pure experience. In his interpretation:

> To experience means to know facts just as they are, to know in accordance with facts by completely relinquishing one's own fabrications. What we usually refer to as experience is adulterated with some sort of thought, so by *pure* I am referring to experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination … In this regard, pure experience is identical with direct experience. When one experiences one's own state of consciousness, there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and its object are completely unified. This is the most refined type of experience.[70]

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in Radical Empiricism" (David Dilworth, "Introduction," in Nishida Kitarō, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview* [Honolulu, 1987], p. 18).

66 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 55.

67 William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (New York and Boston, 1912), pp. 23–4.

68 Thorsten Botz-Bernstein, *Place and Dream: Japan and the Virtual* (Amsterdam, 2004), p. 11.

69 See Arisaka Yōko and Andrew Feenberg, "Experiential Ontology: The Origin of Nishida-Philosophy in the Doctrine of *Pure Experience*," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 30/2 (June 1990).

70 Nishida Kitarō, *An Inquiry into the Good* (New Haven, 1987), pp. 3–4.

As critics have noted, since the emphasis here is on a recognition of nondual reality rather than a discrimination of truth or falsity, the philosophy of pure experience effectively collapses "ought" into "is" and thus appears to subvert ethical practice entirely. Indeed, although a commonly-used analogy to describe the state of pure experience is artistic experience or performance—such as playing the piano—another telling analogy has been offered by Arisaka and Feenberg, who liken Nishida's pure experience to the sort of "group actions" shared in activities such as sports[71]—or, we might add, mob-behavior or warfare. Here James Heisig's insightful comments deserve full citation:

> Nishida sees a fundamental contradiction of form and content at the heart of the moral self. On the one hand, we have the moral self to be strived for—the form—and on the other, the reality of one's own imperfection—the content. The more one is aware of one's own imperfection, the more brightly does the ideal glow. This prompts a kind of rapture in the self that opens up into religious consciousness. In Nishida's thought, this contradiction is relativized by seeing the moral anguish, and the self that suffers it, caught up in an absolute where there is no good or evil, no sin or ideal—only nothingness. This is for Nishida the core of the experience of "salvation." In this way, the core of morality is shifted away from evil in the world to the consciousness of evil in the self. And with it, the imperfections of the world are left to history to sort out.[72]

Against Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)—both the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (Critique of Practical Reason, 1788) and *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone, 1793)[73]—Nishida argues: "religion does not gain adequate definition from the moral standpoint. The religious form of life does not even arise from that standpoint. Even if such a thing were to be imagined, it would not be true religion."[74] In these words one hears echoes of the religious existentialism of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), particularly his three "stages on life's way": aesthetic, ethical, and religious.[75] Religious experience, says Nishida, is not about "ethical progression" of any sort, but it is grounded in the realization of the problematic nature of one's very existence. Religion, as well as the truly conscious self, ultimately emerges from anxiety or *Angst*, not from a desire to be better or to do good. Paradoxically, the self requires a recognition of the emptiness or "eternal death" of the self. In

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71 Arisaka and Feenberg, "Experiential Ontology," p. 181.

72 James W. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School* (Honolulu, 2001), p. 71.

73 See Immanual Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (Cambridge and New York, 1997); Immanual Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York, 1960).

74 Nishida Kitarō, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview* (Honolulu, 1987), p. 82.

75 See Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way* (Princeton, 1998).

short, Nishida conceives of religion as the ultimate transvaluation of morality. "To speak of religion in moral terms," he concludes, "is to set up social existence as the basis of the self's own existential condition." Robert Carter, summing up Nishida's critique of Kant, says "Clearly, the ultimate goal of Buddhism, and of Zen, is not morality, but spirituality."[76] Writing in a more critical vein, for Heisig: "the consequences of [Nishida's] position come to this: the non-I that emerges from the self-awareness of absolute nothingness looks for all the world to be a highly cultivated form of *ataraxia*, a self-transcendence of which the highest good consists of its inability to be moved by either good or evil."[77]

We should also note here the cross-fertilization of concepts between philosophical and literary realms in Taishō and early Shōwa Japan, a connection that has been underexplored. Literary trends of the period show a movement on the part of a number of prominent writers towards what has come to be known as "neo-sensationism" (Shinkankaku-ha). It bears noting that the term itself was first given to these writers by a critic, Chiba Kameo, in an article entitled "Shinkankakuha no tanjō" (The Birth of New Sensationism), and was only embraced by certain figures in the movement—Kawabata in particular—after it had been taken up by the popular press.[78] As one of three major literary movements of the time—along with Marxism and traditional realism—the Shinkankaku-ha or Neo-sensationist School, led by Yokomitsu Riichi (1898–1947) and Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972), produced a literary journal, *Bungei jidai* (Literary Age), which ran from October 1924 to May 1927. As the name implies, the Neo-sensationists sought to extract the heightened sensations of the moment via symbol, suggestion, and variations of mood and emotion.[79] They shared with their contemporary Western modernist peers a reliance on montage and fragmented narrative structures, and a general distrust of both humanism and historicism. As Jonathan Crary has argued, "the disintegration of any indisputable distinction between interior and exterior" emerges as the condition for "a dramatic expansion of the possibilities of aesthetic experience."[80] Moreover, the sort of experience being sought was, again in typically modernist from, epiphanic and thus quasi-religious in character. This is most evident in the critical work of Kawabata, who promotes an aesthetic based on a form of perception beyond conception, and in which there is a merger of subject and object: "I am the lily and the lily is me."

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76 Carter, *Nothingness Beyond God*, p. 129.

77 Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, p. 86.

78 See Chiba Kameo, "Shinkankakuha no tanjō," in Hirano Ken, Odagiri Hideo, and Yamamoto Kenkichi (eds), *Gendai Nihon bungaku ronsōshi*, volume 1 (Tokyo, 1956; originally published in the journal *Seiki*, November 1924), pp. 193–6; Toeda Hirokazu, "Shinkankakuha no hikari to kage," *Bungaku*, 3/6 (2002): p. 123.

79 Chiba, "Shinkankakuha no tanjō," p. 194.

80 Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Life* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 12–13.

> Self and other become one … all things of heaven and earth lose their boundaries to merge into one spirit and form one unified world. On the other hand, when the subjective flows into all things, then this means that all things are endowed with spirit, or in other words, these are the ideas of multi-dimensional pan-spiritism (*tagenteki ban'yū reikonsetsu*). Here lies a new path to salvation. This is the old Eastern subjectivism (*shukanshugi*), or the oneness of the subjective and the objective.[81]

Although the Neo-sensationist writers disclaimed religion—at least in its traditional, institutional, and we might say "realist" forms—their work betrays clear mystical and metaphysical assumptions. In the founding issue of *Bungei jidai*, Kawabata declares the end of the "age of religion" and the dawn of an "age of literature" in which "our successors will discover the secret of immortality and transcend death."[82] Like the arch-modernist Kandinsky (and many Romantics before him), the Neo-sensationists were attempting to substitute an intense, intuitive, immediate (mystical) experience for traditional religious doctrine and ritual. This experience, according to Yokomitsu, "rips off the external aspects of nature to give direct access to the thing itself."[83] The connection here with Nishida and philosophical/Buddhist modernism is not surprising, given that many of these same themes crop up repeatedly in twentieth century modernisms both Western and Asian.[84] What is interesting, however, are the ideological and political implications of such an aesthetic-philosophical-religious approach. As Irena Hayter notes, the "sensory epistemologies of Kawabata and Yokomitsu have a strong anti-rationalist and intuitive slant"[85]—aspects that, combined with a revival of anti-Western and anti-modern tendencies, would become mainstream during the so-called "cultural revival" (*bungei fukkō*) of the mid-1930s, finding popular outlet in the movement for the clarification of national polity (*kokutai meichō undō*), and intellectual expression in the work of numerous writers, thinkers, and critics—best exemplified in the discussions of the symposium on Overcoming Modernity held in the summer of 1942.

In *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida avers: "It is not that experience exists because there is an individual, but that an individual exists because there is

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81 Kawabata Yasunari, "Shinshin sakka no shinkeikô kaisetsu," in *Kawabata Yasunari zenshū*, vol. 30 (Tokyo, 1982), p. 177.

82 Kawabata Yasunari, "Atarashiki seikatsu to atarashiki bungei," in *Gendai bungaku hyōron taikei*, vol. 6 (Tokyo, 1973), p. 241.

83 Yokomitsu Riichi, "Kankaku katsudō: kankaku katsudō to kankakuteki sakubutsu ni taisuru hinan e no gyakusetsu," *Bungei jidai*, 2/2 (February 1925). Translation by Dennis Keene, *Yokomitsu Riichi: Modernist* (New York, 1990), p. 79.

84 See, e.g., Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Culture, Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Princeton, 1993), p. 168.

85 Irena Hayter, "Genealogies of Perception: Kawabata, Yokomitsu and the Showa Crisis of Representation." Draft revision of paper presented to the Otago Conference on Japanese Modernism, University of Otago, New Zealand, August 14–16, 2009, p. 7.

experience."[86] This conclusion, he claims, allows for an avoidance of the trap of solipsism. Also, by taking experience as prior to subjectivity and consciousness itself, Nishida attempts to avoid as well the distinction between subject and object that has bedeviled so much of modern Western thought. Speaking repeatedly of pure experience in terms of the undifferentiation of knowledge, feeling, and volition, it becomes for Nishida a mode of contacting ultimate reality, which appears to be internal rather than external: "Experience means to know reality exactly as it is";[87] and "our true self is not separate from the universe but rather is the very unifier of universal reality."[88] Once again, this process is assumed by Nishida to have distinct moral implications, in that through this merger of self and universe the subjective self is forgotten (as is the object), and one thereby reaches "the quintessence of good." How this actually takes place, however, remains a mystery wrapped in an enigma—or perhaps it is ineffable.

Beyond the question of whether such a pure or pre-conceptual experience is even possible—such a matter is as hard to disprove as to prove—the salient questions here are: a) whether such pure experience can have meaning; and b) whether Nishida is correct to assume that pure experience will lead to or enhance good conduct. With regard to the first of these two questions, Nishida admits: "True pure experience is not meaning in any sense."[89] This does not actually mean that it has no meaning, but rather that, as Heidegger puts it: "Meaning is never the *subject matter* of understanding."[90] While giving the benefit of the doubt to those who claim to have experienced ultimate reality in some direct, non-conceptual way, we might still question whether the experience attained is of in fact "reality" or whether it arises from conditions such as education, training, indoctrination, prior experience, or physiological state. This is not the idealist claim that the experience is not "real," but rather the pragmatic and possibly Buddhist one that it is conditioned in such a way that it may lack applicability (or "meaning") beyond the case of that person's experience at that moment in time. In other words, what can be called in question here is the "purity" of the experience—and therefore the higher-level description of it as being unmediated apprehension of ultimate reality or contact with "the way things really are."[91]

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86 Nishida, *An Inquiry*, p. xv.

87 Ibid., p. 1.

88 Ibid., p. xix.

89 Ibid., p. 1.

90 Martin Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit: Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet* (Frankfurt, 1988), p. 18; see also Maurice Boutin, "Énigme du dire," in M.M. Olivetti (ed.), *Intersubjectivité et théologie philosophique* (Padua, 2001), p. 435.

91 Steven Katz is one scholar of mysticism who takes such an approach to his subject, rejecting the very idea of pure experience; see Steven Katz, *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (New York, 1978); Steven Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York, 1978).

Despite the unquestioned originality of his work, subsequent twentieth-century Western philosophy has raised various doubts about a number of assumptions inherent in Nishida's writings. While Nishida attempts to resolve the subject-object dualism by way of asserting an *a priori*, pre-cognitive awareness out of which subject and object arise, he fails to call into question the deeper metaphysical dualisms implicit in the contrast between mediated or cognitive thought and unmediated or pure experience, which can be seen as a subset of the greater (Indo-Greek) dualism of appearance and reality or—one is tempted to add—the dualism of *samsara* and *nirvāṇa*. Richard Rorty's reflections on the fate of some pre-eminent modern Western philosophers applies as well to Nishida's case:

> Kant was a turning point in the history of Western philosophy because he was a *reductio ad absurdum* of the attempt to distinguish between the role of the subject and the role of the object in constituting knowledge. Hegel realized this, and realized that the distinctions between the subjective and the objective have to be transcended. Unfortunately, Hegel himself used the terms "subjective" and "objective" to describe the sequence of successive descriptions which successive social needs made necessary as moral and intellectual progress continued, and used the term "union of subject and object" to describe the end of history. This was a mistake, because it took an outdated dualism too seriously.[92]

In similar fashion, it would seem as though Nishida in his struggle with these same inherited dualisms took them rather too seriously. Indeed, given the long tradition of Buddhist deconstruction of such, Nishida may have ended up grappling with problems that the Buddhist traditions he was utilizing had already, however erratically and unsystematically, set aside. For Rorty, Hegel would have done better to take the pragmatist turn, as did John Dewey (1859–1952), describing intellectual and moral progress in terms of the growth of freedom, rather than as a quest for or realization of Absolute Knowledge. Given Nishida's remarks in the opening pages of *An Inquiry into the Good*—that his task was to "investigate what we ought to do and where we ought to find peace of mind"[93]—the latent pragmatic side of his philosophical work might have gained through this shift.

A similar notion of pure experience is central to Christian mysticism as well as modern European Romantic traditions, where "we find the image of the unschooled poetic genius who, lacking the obstructions of culture and training, penetrates to the very heart of the matter, whether in music, art, or philosophy."[94] In recent years,

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92 Richard Rorty, "A World without Substances or Essences," in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London, 1999), p. 49.

93 For thinkers like Rorty and Dewey, Nishida gives away the game when he notes that this quest: "calls first for clarification of the nature of the universe, human life, and true reality" (Nishida, *An Inquiry*, pp. 37–8); see Tremblay, *Nishida Kitaro*, p. 16.

94 Dale S. Wright, *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 23.

one of the strongest critiques of the Idealist and Romantic legacy within Western thought has come from Donald Davidson (1917–2003), particularly his classic essay "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," where Davidson challenges what he refers to as the "third dogma" of empiricism.

> The dualism of scheme and content, of organizing system and something waiting to be organized, cannot be made intelligible or defensible. It is itself a dogma of empiricism, the third dogma. A third, and perhaps last, for if we give it up, then it is not clear that there is anything distinctive left to be called empiricism.[95]

A similar argument can be found in the work of French thinker Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), who also asserts that nothing in the realm of our actual experience fits with the empiricist notion of pure experience. Taken together with the earlier work of Willard Van Orman Quine (1908–2000), who developed a critique of the first two dogmas of empiricism, Davidson's thesis amounts to a denial that, prior to cognitive interpretation, sensation has qualities that can be experienced non-cognitively. Davidson's criticism can be read as being coincident with a long tradition of Buddhist thought on this matter, and thus provides a useful buttress to the Critical Buddhism critique of Kyoto School philosophy—though it is a two-edged sword that may also turn back on Critical Buddhism itself.

Pure experience as developed by Nishida in *An Inquiry into the Good* clearly falls under the critique of topicalism presented by Critical Buddhism, in its appeal to a hypothetical unifying, monistic ground that transcends all conditions and contingencies. Takahashi Satomi (1886–1964) argued that Nishida's approach actually sets up a more robust dualism than that of subject and object, which the idea of pure experience was meant to overcome. The "critical"—or what Nishida's earliest critic Tanabe more precisely called the "thetic"—faculty, by which one is able to posit an other outside of one's self (*jiko ni tai shite*), is thereby rendered inert.[96] Yet, we must take this issue further, since in his later writings Nishida, while not abandoning the idea, turned away from speaking of pure experience in the terms described in *An Inquiry into the Good*, replacing such with a more nuanced and, in his understanding, more clearly Buddhist concept of *basho* (*topos*). While connected with *An Inquiry into the Good*'s pure experience, the logic of place is a more sophisticated and complex theory that would become central to Nishida's later writings.

In the works written between 1926 and 1930, Nishida was mainly concerned with the epistemological implications of *basho*, whereas the subsequent period, his final works written in the period leading up to and through the Pacific War (1931–1945), deal more extensively with *basho vis-à-vis* "the world of action" and historical reality. This late turn has been called Nishida's *Kehre*

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[95] Donald Davidson, *Inquiries Into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford, 2001), p. 49.

[96] For Tanabe, *thetic* judgment is the basis of one's common-sense relation to phenomena.

from a philosophy of self-consciousness to one of history-politics, possibly as a response to the writings of Tanabe.[97] As Dilworth explains, beginning with *From the Acting to the Seeing* (1927), Nishida turned away from his earlier reliance on Western thinkers such as Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), the neo-Kantians and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), and towards a self-consciously Eastern or Buddhistic understanding of *basho* based on the notion of "absolute nothingness" (*zettai no mu*).[98] Indeed, the "logic of place" becomes virtually interchangeable with the "logic of nothingness." In the chapter on "Basho," Nishida argues that the knower and known are always in relation, and thus involve the unifying whole in which they both exist. As a result, the self, conceived as the "pure unity of mental acts," which includes non-ego, "can in turn be regarded as the 'topos' (*basho*) in which the subject-object intentionality has emerged."[99] Arisaka and Feenberg have noted the parallels in Nishida's description with the Zen doctrine of no-mind (*mushin*).[100] Though stated as absolute nothingness, this condition is not negative, but, as with *mushin* and the Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyāta*, *kū*), it is a negative space that opens up a limitless possibility.

> It is precisely by virtue of its emptiness and all-inclusiveness that the noetic "non-being" of consciousness in general transcends all noematic "being." And for this reason the "world of meaning," in which objects can be abstracted and analyzed in various ways, and the "world of judgment," which is the reflection of these objects and their relations, always emerge within the field of consciousness in general.[101]

One thing that emerges from this argument is that reality or things-in-themselves are not in fact known through cognition, but rather can be known in the sense of "being disclosed ontologically by the 'self-awakening' that takes place only on this trans-cognitive level."[102] Here, with the transplanting of ontology over epistemology, some of the gravest problems of *topos* arise. Despite the explicit attempt to render his logic of experience along Mahāyāna Buddhist lines, Nishida's use of emptiness (as absolute nothingness) lacks a firm connection to *pratītya-samutpāda*. That is to say, it takes on a quality that transcends time if not space, and neglects the significance of conditions and causality in bringing about the situation of self-awakening. Despite (or perhaps because of) the more direct

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97 See Huh Woo-Sung, "The Philosophy of History in the 'Later' Nishida: A Philosophic Turn," *Philosophy East and West*, 40/3 (1990): p. 357.

98 David Dilworth, "Nishida Kitarō: Nothingness as the Negative Space of Experiential Immediacy," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 13/4 (1973): p. 471.

99 Ibid., p. 477.

100 Arisaka and Feenberg, "Experiential Ontology," p. 156.

101 Dilworth, "Nishida Kitarō," pp. 479–80.

102 Ibid., p. 480.

Buddhist inspiration and the use of Buddhist terms, the logic of place remains troubled by topicalist limits.

In Nishida's last writings, the logic of place, along with the philosophy of "active intuition" and religious awakening, come to be more closely related to ethics and political behavior. "Religiously awakened people," writes Nishida, "become 'master of every situation' as the self-determination of the absolute present. In all respects these people are active. For each, 'the place in which one stands is truth' … From a true religious awakening one can submit to the state."[103] This idea is repeated in an essay written in 1944: "True obedience to the nation should be derived from the standpoint of true religious self-awareness. Mere seeking one's own peace of mind is selfish."[104] Even more significant, Nishida—borrowing a line from Kegon Buddhism—emphasized the importance of "See[ing] the universal in the particular thing." While this notion is fairly innocuous in itself (one finds an identical idea in Western Romanticism), Nishida situated it in concrete terms by locating the universal principle in the particular "locus" known as *tennō*—i.e., the Japanese Emperor, thereby providing philosophical buttress to ultranationalistic *kokutai* ideology. Ironically, in his attempt to give a more concrete and socio-historical understanding of *basho*, Nishida ends up creating, however unwittingly, a highly abstract and dehistoricized ideological basis for the imperialist vision of the day.[105] It should be noted that, particularly in his personal letters, Nishida felt obvious discomfort as to the way ultranationalism was sweeping the country in the 1930s and 1940s. Some commentators have suggested that, in fact, Nishida was mimicking the language of the militarists in order to bring it up from the concrete reality of war and into some higher philosophico-religious sphere. This remains an open and perhaps irresolvable issue.

Critical Buddhists Matsumoto and Hakamaya assert that the philosophers of the Kyoto School, in their attempt to bridge the divide of East and West, absorbed the worst of both traditions, effectively fusing the *topos* of Zen with the equally topical essentialism of the anti-rational/anti-Cartesian stream of Western philosophy, culminating in the phenomenological work of Husserl and Heidegger. As such the Kyoto School not only contributed to the legitimization of wartime "emperor-system fascism," but their legacy allowed for the postwar resurgence in Japan of topical thinkers such as Giambattista Vico and ultimately for the popularity of postmodern theory, with its concomitant shades of relativism and nihilism. In their many attacks on Nishida, Nishitani, and Tanabe, the Critical Buddhists rarely mention a fourth figure, who, while peripheral to the Kyoto School, was influenced by and in turn greatly influenced postwar Japanese thinking, especially in the field of ethics: Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960). A true polymath, Watsuji published monographs on Nietzsche (1913) and Kierkegaard

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[103] Quoted in Ives, *Zen Awakening*, p. 23.

[104] Nishida Kitarō, "Towards a Philosophy of Religion with the Concept of Pre-Established Harmony as Guide," *Eastern Buddhist, New Series*, 2/1 (1970): p. 45.

[105] See Ives, *Zen Awakening*, p. 25.

(1915)—for which he was credited with introducing existentialism to Japan—Japanese art and literature (1920), Dōgen (1923), primitive Buddhism (1927), Buddhism in Japan (1920; 1926), primitive Christianity (1926), Confucius (1938), and Greek culture (1948). The study of ethics was a somewhat late concern, though very much indebted to his earlier religious, historical, aesthetic, and cross-cultural investigations. Regarding the debate between Dilworth and LaFleur regarding religious aspects of Watsuji's work, I think Dilworth is mistaken is de-Buddhizing Watsuji. Though Confucian elements are evident in his work, I agree with LaFleur (and Watsuji himself) in seeing Buddhism as *the* prominent influence in Watsujian thought, especially by the time of *Rinrigaku*.[106] The following section analyses the place of nothingness in the philosophico-religious ethics of Watsuji, and more particularly the relation between his ethical-ontological principle of *aidagara* ("betweenness"), Heidegger's *Mit-sein* (being-with) and *Sorge* (Care), and the notion of "absolute mediation" developed by Watsuji's contemporary and Kyoto School thinker Tanabe Hajime. I argue that a fuller analysis of Watsujian "betweenness" *vis-à-vis* Heidegger and Tanabe opens an alternative understanding of a Buddhist ontology of relation—one that goes beyond the Critical Buddhist dichotomy of *critica* and *topos* and thus deepens the debate surrounding the Kyoto School's (and Zen's) so-called "forgetting of ethics."

In Japan, Watsuji proclaims in his *Rinrigaku*, ethics is the study of *ningen*—human being.[107] The term *ningen* and the compound *ningen sonzai* are crucial to Watsuji's thesis: Western ethics, he argues, has been unable to come to terms with human relationships precisely because it conceives of individuals in a atomistic way—in which any meeting of persons is something of a "fall" from the self-realized unity or the preservation of unitive individual being. Watsuji notes that, in contrast to the English term "human being," *ningen* already implies sociality or relationship. The Sino-Japanese character *nin* (or *hito*) signifies two men supporting each other, while *gen* (or *aida*) implies "between" or "among." Thus Watsuji's gloss on *ningen* is a kind of ontological-ethical credo: "men, who are supporting each other, exist in the world."

As an ethical being, that is, a truly human being, one *negates* individualism by abandoning one's (already acquired) independence from others, and by "realizing" (both in the sense of *coming to see* and *making real* or actualizing) the mutual interrelatedness of persons. This, for Watsuji, is the true meaning of "selflessness" and the true basis of goodness or compassion. In other words, at the very ground of individual being, let us call this for the moment the "self," there exists a primary

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[106] See Robert Carter, "Afterword," in *Watsuji Tetsurō's Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan* (Albany, 1996), p. 338; David Dilworth, "Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960): Cultural Phenomenologist and Ethician," *Philosophy East and West*, 24/1 (1974): pp. 3–22; William LaFleur, "Buddhist Emptiness in the Ethics and Aesthetics of Watsuji Tetsurō," *Religious Studies*, 14 (1978): pp. 237–50.

[107] The complete title of *Rinrigaku* is *Ningen no gaku to shite no rinrigaku*.

"revolt against" the association of individuals; a process of inevitable individuation. If this association is conceived as a "negation" (of the whole), as, indeed, nothing less than *the materialization of absolute negation*, then "individuation" is a negation of absolute negativity (or emptiness). Thus "an individual becomes an individual by negating emptiness … as her own fundamental space. This is the self-negation of absolute negativity." But this is only part of the process: "In addition to that, an individual must be subordinate to society through emptying herself, regardless of how this emptying is performed."[108] Watsuji's last phrase may, and perhaps should, give us pause. What does he mean by "regardless of how this emptying is performed"? Watsuji goes on in this passage to conclude that human association so conceived is understood to be "the movement of the negation of negation in which absolute negativity returns to itself through its own self-negation"; and that, moreover, this picture includes human association as "coercion." Thus the "continuous creation of human beings" that is "the basic principle of ethics" must be taken not simply as the biblical "good creation" of more life but also as the "bad creation" of the Orwellian or Huxleyan sort. Here too we see the complex dialectic or oscillation that exists within human being—a continual to and fro between the demands of self-expression and the call to sociality. In order to elucidate the precise meaning of Watsuji's formulation of the ontological basis for ethics, it will help to look briefly at his primary Western source and sometimes foil: Martin Heidegger. Watsuji traveled in Germany and Europe in 1927, and, like his countrymen Nishitani and Tanabe, came into immediate contact with both the work and person of Martin Heidegger. The young Heidegger had recently become the *doyen* of German phenomenological thinking, usurping the mantle of his mentor Husserl. Upon returning to Japan, Watsuji penned *Fūdo* (*Climate and Culture*) as a direct response to Heidegger's just-published *Sein und Zeit*. Though ultimately critical of Heidegger's philosophy, Watsuji's considered response indicates that he—as with many other modern Japanese scholars—believed the German thinker's work to be of epoch-making importance, and potentially a bridge over the East-West divide.

According to Watsuji, Heidegger erred in: a) his ultimate commitment to the language and philosophical structures of individualism and consequent neglect of the social dimension of human being (or the *Mit-sein* of *Dasein*); and b) his privileging of time and the temporal over place and spatiality. Let us begin with the first point of criticism. Here Watsuji diverges from the standard postmodern criticism offered by Derrida and others, namely, that Heidegger was never able to free himself from the "logocentrism" of Western metaphysics, even as he managed to escape some of its other pitfalls. For Watsuji, it is not primarily in the pining for Being that Heidegger goes astray (this is a regrettable but understandable consequence of his rootedness in Western ontology or onto-theology), but in the very framework of this thought, where, in Cartesian/Kantian fashion, the primary

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108 Watsuji Tetsurō, *Watsuji Tetsurō's Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan* (Albany, 1996), p. 117.

relationship is between the "individual"—Dasein—and the non-human world (whether such is conceived as Nature, Being, or God).

Heidegger understood being-in-the-world (*in-die-Welt-sein*) in terms of the practical (or "ready-to-hand") use of "tools," and thus, for all his claims to have overthrown traditional metaphysical subjectivism, grounded his analysis in inescapably subjectivist language. "[T]he spatiality inherent in 'a being there' is, in the final analysis, attributed to the relationship of concern between I and tools and has nothing to do with the relationship of communication among human beings."[109] Though tropes of "being-with" (*Mit-sein*) and Care/Concern (*Sorge*) occur quite often in the Heideggerian corpus, these themes, according to Watsuji, remain relatively underdeveloped, and do not easily connect with Heidegger's more general thesis regarding Being and Time. This point requires some elaboration. Care—in which the whole structure of *Dasein* is understood, in its threefold nature as *thrownness*, *fallenness*, and *possibility*, to be "ahead of itself in already being in the world as being alongside what it encounters in the world"—is interpreted by Heidegger primarily if not solely in terms of temporality, by way of anxiety and being-towards-death.[110] Thus Care ultimately lacks the sense of (embodied) compassion between human beings.

We should note that Watsuji neglects to mention that Heidegger does in fact deal with "place," and in a quite novel way: in practical concern or Care, Heidegger argues, distance itself becomes degeometricized, and thus space becomes trans-spatial (e.g., when speaking on the telephone, one's interlocutor is "nearer" than the person in the next room, because she is part of one's immediate "world"). Yet Watsuji is correct (and not the first to note) that this perspective, which would seem to open up the possibility of Care being manifest in terms of the space of neighborliness, is a path that Heidegger deigns not to pursue. This may be because, in an obvious debt to Nietzsche (but also to Jaspers and perhaps even the *Frankfurter Schule*) Heidegger was intensely, almost obsessively wary of Mass Society or the Public—*das Man* ("Them"). *Dasein*, after all, cannot be entirely an "I am" if it also has to be a "with-them."

Thus a non-trivial tension arises between authentic *being-with*, and inauthentic *being-with-Them*. It became clear to Heidegger that one of the lamentable symptoms of the modern age is precisely that "one's own Dasein dissolves completely into the kind of being of 'the Others' …"—thus *das Man* emburdens authentic *being-in-the-world*. Though Care (*Sorge*) unifies *Dasein*, even Care must recognize the fallenness of man-as-They. For the Frankfurt thinkers and sundry existentialists, this situation of "alienation" requires nothing less than a (Kierkegaardian) leap into subjectivity, even if it is a leap without a sure foundation or goal. But Heidegger's Care is not by any means an "ethical" modality; his use of this term, as with so many others, rids it of its conventional meaning. For Heidegger, this divestiture or deconstruction is a necessary step towards rediscovering the true meaning of

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109 Watsuji, *Rinrigaku*, p. 174.

110 Ibid., p. 215.

terms; for others (such as Pierre Bourdieu) it is an emptying out of meaning with deep and disastrous implications on the philosophical and political level.

For Watsuji, whatever may be valuable in the Heideggerian trope of Care is lost in Care's relentlessly temporal aspect, and in its corresponding abstraction. Care is not situated in space, or bodies, nor is it ever associated with Others (tarnished in Heidegger as They). Along the same lines, Watsuji asserts that Heidegger's temporality is a purely individualized sort, and "fails to materialize in the form of historicality"—which is the concrete temporality of persons-in-community.[111] One's thrownness is a burden, and the sense of repentance—of coming to terms with one's past—is not at all evident in the Heideggerian concept. In attempting to think Heidegger further, Watsuji contrasts Heidegger's *in-die-Welt-Sein* to the Japanese concepts *yononaka* and *seken*—"the public"—which signify not merely the spatiality of human relationships but also the temporality of such. Watsuji raises problems with Heidegger's key philosophical term *Sein* or Being. Within Western philosophy, Being plays the role of the "ground" of existence and of logic: it is the "A is A" (Fichte) and the "direct, undetermined 'to be'" (Hegel).[112] However, the grandeur, plenitude, and "objectivity" of Being limit its applicability in terms of ethics. Western Being must be re-evaluated in terms more familiar and applicable to the Japanese situation, and to the condition of sociality more generally. Watsuji suggests that the Japanese term *sonzai* (*son* = maintenance or subsistence against loss [time] + *zai* = remaining within relationships [space]) is a more appropriate term for describing "the subjective, practical, and dynamic structure of human being."[113]

Thus, though Heidegger goes beyond the "contemplative approach" to human existence, which reached an apogee in the transcendental phenomenology of his mentor Husserl, his remarks on "concernful dealings," while opening up spatiality as the structure of subjective existence, ultimately confines such to the relation of human beings and tools, and effectively bypasses interpersonal relationships. This limited sense of spatiality is the reason, Watsuji claims, that Heidegger considered temporality to be of greater importance than spatiality.[114] There is some irony

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[111] "What is the field in which two *Dasein* coexist? This field must also belong to the basic structure of *sonzai*" (ibid., p. 221).

[112] Ibid., p. 19.

[113] Ibid., p. 21.

[114] Ibid., p. 175. But see Yuasa's comments on Heidegger's later *Kehre* as "a turn from temporal life to spatial life"; Yuasa Yasuo, "Appendix: Correspondence with Yuasa Yasuo," in Watsuji Tetsurō, *Watsuji Tetsurō's Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan* (New York, 1996), p. 336; also Sakai's critique of Watsuji on Heidegger; Sakai Naoki, "Return to the West/Return to the East: Watsuji Tetsurō's Anthropology and Discussions of Authenticity," *Boundary 2*, 18/3 (1991): pp. 157–90. In the end, I am inclined to agree with Dilworth, Emmanuel Lévinas, George Steiner, Werner Marx and others who argue that Heidegger was never able to extend his concern with "concern" in a meaningful ethical way, and that this lacuna reflects a latent "subjectivism" in his work. See Dilworth, "Watsuji Testurō"; Emmanuel Lévinas, *Hors sujet*

here, regarding Heidegger's professed intention to escape the bondage of Western metaphysics and its subjectivist/humanist underpinnings. Indeed, it is precisely the latent anti-humanism in the Heideggerian corpus (coupled with his infamous silence about his Nazi affiliations after 1945) that provides the fodder for the prosecutors of his "case." But this makes Watsuji's critique seem odd: how can Heidegger, of all people, be accused of subjectivism? The answer, I contend, is less difficult than it may initially appear. Heidegger's rejection of the metaphysical "forgetting of Being," necessitated a turn from "ontic" (Gr. *ontisch*) to "ontological" (Gr. *ontologische*) thinking. This move, while effectively subverting, for instance, the Cartesian and Kantian ego, also subverts the community of egos that make up the dominant Western conception of sociality. While this is, in some ways, a positive "deconstructive" move, Heidegger lacks the concepts or terms to allow for a rebirth of sociality out of emptiness or betweenness. In short, "man," in becoming "the neighbor of Being," loses touch with his neighbors who happen to be mere "beings." For Watsuji, the result is not an overcoming of nihilism (which the Heideggerian project, in the wake of Nietzsche, claimed to be), but rather a nihilism *in extremis*.[115] The precise differences between Heideggerian and Buddhist/Kyoto School understandings of nothingness bears further work, however it is clear that Heidegger was not working with the doctrine of *śūnyāta*. We might also note, in this regard, the abyssal *Liebestod* that colors the darker side of German Romanticism—and which crops up in Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1918), a work with which the young Heidegger was quite familiar.

The basic principles of Watsujian social ethics can be deduced from this critical reading of Heidegger. What is sought in (ethical) being—*sonzai*—is the realization of totality through the individual. Though this, at first glance, seems to fall into the hands of the Critical Buddhists, who lament the (re)turn to "totality" over rational-critical (and ethical) discrimination and differentiation, Watsuji insists that this process occurs only through the "negation" of *both* the individual and the totality. Above all, it is imperative to understand that *ningen sonzai* does not rely upon Being as a source of existence, but upon nothingness or emptiness (*kū*). "One can contend that I becomes aware of itself only through the medium of non-I, by making a detour of nothingness only on the ground of the subject in which the self and other are not yet disrupted."[116]

Thus, in a formula that superficially resembles the Hegelian dialectic, the individual must first "realize" herself as the "other" over and against the social whole—this is a crucial stage towards self-awareness. Indeed, "[a]part from the self-awareness of individuals there is no social ethics." Independent consciousness

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(Paris, 1987); George Steiner, *Martin Heidegger* (Chicago, 1991); Werner Marx, *Towards a Phenomenological Ethics: Ethos and the Life-World* (Albany, 1994).

[115] See Steiner's remarks on the reading (by Rudolf Carnap, among others) of Heidegger's "play with and on Nothingness" as a path leading to nihilism rather than out of it (Steiner, *Martin Heidegger*, p. 154).

[116] Watsuji, *Rinrigaku*, p. 225.

is not something to be disdained or avoided, but is in fact part and parcel of ethical "self"-realization. The standpoint of independent consciousness—the I—is "acquired" only through a primary disassociation from family, tradition, and society. "Just as we are able to abstractively produce an individual's consciousness of retention by wiping away all elements of betweenness, so our own selfhood is recognizable only at the extreme point where all betweenness is eliminated." True communality is possible only through this initial "moment" of independence. However, one must come to recognize that individuality cannot itself sustain an independent existence, but is grounded in a negation of the totality: "its essence is negation, that is, emptiness."[117]

The other "moment" in the process is one in which the individual "surrenders" to the totality; Watsuji calls this "the demand of the superindividual will."[118] This is another Watsujian phrase that rings suspicious to postwar ears, and it is indeed one that has played into the hands of those accusing Watsuji of wartime collaboration. Whether by this "call of the totality" Watsuji means to imply the Emperor/State or whether he refers to the transpersonal (or interpersonal) realm in a more general sense remains something of an open question.[119] What is most significant here is Watsuji's attempt to situate ethics, and ontology, in the "betweenness" of persons, and to understand "authenticity" in terms of the self's annihilation, an annihilation which involves not a total disappearance but rather a reconfiguration out of emptiness: an identification with others in a nondualistic, but also non-monistic, meeting of self and other.[120] Unlike the Hegelian dialectic, with its sublation (Gr. *Aufgehoben*) of the thesis by the antithesis, in Watsuji we have a fuller preservation

[117] Ibid., p. 80.

[118] Ibid., p. 23.

[119] Bellah, Sakai, and Dilworth are the harshest critics of Watsuji's "nationalism," but even the more moderate Pincus and Odin acknowledge the strong connection between Watsuji's writings and "totalitarian state ethics" (if not "emperor system fascism"). Like Nishida and Tanabe, Watsuji's biggest failing in this regard is his onetime equivalence of the Emperor as the locus of absolute nothingness, and thus the "ground" and focus of individual and social existence. See Bellah, "Japan's Cultural Identity"; Sakai, "Return to the West"; David Dilworth, "Guiding Principles of Interpretation in Watsuji Tetsurō's *History of Japanese Ethics*," in James Heisig (ed.), *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy* (Nagoya, 2006), pp. 101–12; Leslie Pincus, "In a Labyrinth of Western Desire: Kuki Shūzō and the Discovery of Japanese Being," *Boundary 2*, 18/3 (1991): pp. 142–56; Steve Odin, "The Social Self in Japanese Philosophy and American Pragmatism: A Comparative Study of Watsuji Tetsurō and George Herbert Mead," *Philosophy East and West*, 42 (1992): pp. 475–501.

[120] Watsuji's remarks here bear remarkable similarity to the work of: a) Emmanuel Lévinas (1906–1995) a student of Heidegger who was also concerned with the lack of an interpersonal (and thus ethical) dimension in the Heideggerian corpus (and in phenomenology more generally); and b) Jürgen Habermas, whose thesis of "communicative action" or "discourse ethics" sustains the notion of an interpersonal self.

of the terms of the "dialectic"—an oscillation rather than a true synthesis.[121] The self does not absolutely disappear, nor is it sublated, nor does it "return" as an original, pure or True Self, but simply is now "realized" as "being empty," or, in the words of Tanabe Hajime, "empty being."

Let us now turn to an analysis of the work of Tanabe Hajime. Like Nishitani and Watsuji, Tanabe studied in Germany in the early 1920s, and, as with these two, was highly influenced by the work of Husserl and Heidegger. In 1928 he succeeded to Nishida's chair in philosophy at Kyoto University, a post he held through the war. Always fascinated with Hegel, he fell under the influence of the young Marxist thinkers of the period; e.g., Miki Kiyoshi (1897–1945) and Tosaka Jun (1900–1945), the latter of whom would become, with Tanabe, Nishida's harshest critic. Despite his one-time equivalence of the Emperor with the "nothingness" that must undergird democracy, Tanabe's focus on the self-as-agent/agency (*shutai*) over the self-as-contemplative consciousness (*shakun*) clearly reflects his Marxist sympathies, as well as his general desire to bring ethics back into the heart of Japanese Buddhism and philosophy. A prominent conception in postwar Japanese Marxism was the (Sartrean) notion that the "abyss" of nothingness must underlie the freedom of the acting subject in the historical world.[122] Likewise, Tanabe's "subject" is first and foremost an agent, a subject-in-action or in-relation-with-others. And yet, Tanabe's subject ultimately diverges from the Sartrean-Marxist subject, due largely to his Kyoto School/Buddhist roots, where nothingness cannot be left as nihility or negativity, some sort of existential "abyss," but must be understood in terms of absolute nothingness, or *kū* (*śūnyāta*). In any case, Tanabe would concur with Watsuji's comment that "The study of ethics is the study … of the subject as a practical, active connection" (*jissentekikōitekirenkan*)."[123] It must be noted, however, that Tanabe's acting-subject acts out of a voluntary submission to the call or prompting of the Other-power. His is ultimately a philosophico-religious vision of *tariki*. In other words, the self acts while being acted upon, and this effects a "conversion from negation to affirmation, from [being-toward] death to [being-toward] life."[124]

The key terms in Tanabe's thought, which serve to distinguish his work from that of the other two major Kyoto School figures, Nishida and Nishitani, are the *logic of species*, *metanoesis*, and *absolute mediation*. In what follows I will focus on the latter two concepts, which form the foundation of Tanabe's most significant work, *Philosophy as Metanoetics* (1946), introduced briefly above. *Metanoesis* (Jp. *zange*) "entails the painful recollection of one's past sins, a feeling of remorse

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121 See Carter, "Afterword," p. 341.

122 See Umemoto Katsumi's "The Limits of Human Freedom" (*Ningenteki jiyū no genkai*), published in *Tenhō*, February 1947.

123 Victor Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan* (Chicago, 1996), p. 103.

124 James Heisig, "Foreword," in Tanabe Hajime, *Philosophy as Metanoetics* (Berkeley, 1986), p. xliv.

accompanied by the strong wish that these sins had not been committed."[125] Crucial to Tanabe's thesis is the fact that the *meta* of meta-noetics implies that such ultimately "surpasses the position of mere contemplation (*noesis*)."[126] Yet what must also be noted is precisely the "after" aspect of *meta-noesis*, which is not meant to be anti-rational or irrational, i.e., not an erasure or sublation of reason, logic, language, or criticism, but a way of pushing the critique of reason to its limits—a task, in Tanabe's eyes, begun but left incomplete by Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard. In fact, Tanabe goes so far as to call his logic of metanoetics "absolute criticism."

Absolute criticism is simply the existential involvement of the subject involved in the critical task, such that, faced with the "crisis of its own dilemma," the subject "surrenders" to its own self-criticism. This is not expressed by Tanabe in terms of the self's dissolution, but rather as the "breaking-through (*Durchbruch*) of a self that hitherto had moved exclusively within the realms of discursive thinking and reflection."[127] Moreover, this is the point at which "absolute mediation" becomes involved: the "truth" of the absolute can only "function" in its relative mediation with the world of forms and relative beings.[128] In other words, absolute mediation takes the form of mediation through other beings; "the effect of the absolute on the relative only becomes *real* as the effect of the relative on the relative."[129] It is noteworthy that Tanabe's own *metanoesis* or conversion emerged in the context of Japan's impending defeat, and his own sense of powerlessness and lack of freedom with respect to the military regime's jingoism. Thus, rather than *metanoesis* being a turn away from the world to silence or contemplation of the absolute, it is, at least for Tanabe himself, a response to a lack of self-expression, dialogue, and criticism. *Metanoesis* can thus be conceived in terms of a bulwark against irrationalism, as much as against the excesses of reason and conceptualization.

Here we see an obvious parallel between *absolute criticism* and Watsuji's *aidagara* as the ground for ethics and human being. Nothingness does not appear in itself "but only through its real channel which is historical being … What determines the individual is always species as an historical, relative particular form of being. It is not some absolute negativity of nothingness apart from the movement of this relative negativity."[130] Of course, both Nishida and Nishitani also insist that their nothingness is not to be understood as "absolute negativity"

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125 Ibid., p. xliii.

126 Takeuchi, quoted in ibid., p. xlv.

127 Tanabe, *Metanoetics*, p. 4.

128 This correlates with Streng's argument that: "Nāgārjuna presumes no 'absolute' in relation to a 'particular' but empty structures of particulars" (Frederick Streng, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* [New York, 1967], p. 151); see also Glyn Richards, "*Śūnyatā*: Objective Referent or *Via Negativa*," *Religious Studies*, 14 (1978): pp. 251–60.

129 Tanabe, *Metanoetics*, p. 19, my emphasis.

130 Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity*, p. 118.

but rather the plenitude of “emptiness” that is at the “ground” (or “field”) of such negativity, but Tanabe’s “historicalization” of the philosophy of nothingness bespeaks a markedly different approach to the problem, and one that goes some way towards answering our concerns regarding the “lack of history” in the work of the Kyoto School thinkers.[131]

Absolute mediation takes place only through the irruption of absolute nothingness into relative being. In other words:

> Being here is “being as upāya,” [*hōbentiki-sonzai*] that is, being as a mediator of nothingness. Moreover, human existential self-awareness, which realizes the compassion and altruism of the bodhisattva through the equality of mutual transformation, must be a mediation of nothingness in the sense of just such a transformation of subjectivity.[132]

Thus, Tanabe concludes, metanoetics—and *only* metanoetics—is able to overcome, on the one hand, the problems of individualism that besets Western conceptions of freedom, and, on the other, the lack of individual agency, ethics, and this-worldliness of which Buddhism, and Zen in particular, is often, with some justification, accused.

Tanabe’s emphasis on the necessary “return to the world” (*gensō*) that accompanies the “movement towards the absolute” (*ōsō*) is largely directed against what he feels are the misunderstandings of Zen by ordinary people. One of Tanabe’s primary (unstated but thinly-disguised) targets is his ex-mentor Nishida, in particular Nishida’s concepts of *basho*/*topos* and the “absolute identity of self-contradictions.” According to Tanabe, these Nishidan terms imply a “non-discrimination of discrimination” (*mufunbetsu no funbetsu*) that is in fact very far from the “logic of Zen,” which is best exemplified in the reverse formulation: the “discrimination of nondiscrimination.”[133] In the former, the emphasis is on the epistemological primacy of nondiscrimination, and thus a logic of both/and, rather than neither/nor. Very much in line with the Critical Buddhists (but 40 years in advance of them),[134] Tanabe takes Nishida to task for preaching a reliance on the *topos* of absolute nothingness, as if it were a kind of abstract universal—“some space with no specific orientation of direction of any particular point within it.”[135] We might see here a parallel to Aristotle’s frustration with Plato’s abstract “forms”[136]

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131 See e.g., Heisig, “Foreword,” p. xx; Langdon Gilkey, “Nishitani Keiji’s *Religion and Nothingness*,” in *The Religious Philosophy of Nishitani Keiji* (Berkeley, 1989), p. 68.

132 Tanabe, *Metanoetics*, p. 109.

133 Ibid., p. 56.

134 Tanabe’s remarks are often remarkably prescient of Critical Buddhism; see, e.g., Tanabe, *Metanoetics*, p. 171. Of course, given the postwar criticism directed at Tanabe himself, the Critical Buddhist response might be: *Physician, heal thyself!*

135 Tanabe, *Metanoetics*, p. 11.

136 Aristotle, *Ethics*, I.vi.

and also, within classical Indian thought, Rāmānuja's response to Śankara's non-dualism, in which, for Rāmānuja, the inseparability of human and God/Other-power is not conceived as absolute identity, but the latter retains hegemony, and the former must respond in absolute faith and love. In short, Nishida-philosophy, and, by extension, much of modern Japanese philosophy, lacks a sense of *mediation* and (absolute) *critique*.

As we have seen, ethics (*rinri*) for Watsuji entails not simply a disciplined reflection on right or wrong, or on the proper ways of acting in social circumstances, but is about what it means to be a human in the world; ethics is, to borrow a term from Heidegger: "fundamental ontology." But within this conception lies not only existential "facticity" but also *sociality*: being in the world is not just a relation of the ego and the world of Being, but a relation between beings. Here etymology comes into play once again. The Japanese term *rin* (or *nakama*) implies "fellowship"—"a body or system of relations, which a definitive group of persons have with respect to each other, [and which also] signifies individual persons as determined by this system."[137] *Rin* also connotes "agreement" (*kimari*), "form" (*koto*), and "order among persons," while *ri* signifies "reason." Thus *rinri*, or ethics, is "the order or pattern through which the communal existence of human beings is rendered possible."[138]

The notion of "the betweenness of persons" (*hito to hito to no aidagara*) is fundamental to Watsuji's ethics, and must be examined in greater detail. Despite the fact that it is always "concrete," betweenness is manifest not simply in the physical situation of "meeting," but in the "dialogue" that takes place in such a situation. In Habermasian fashion, dialogue is a form of communicative action, in which: "[w]hat I hear is not a succession of sounds, but the *koto* that expresses the betweenness of I and Thou. Even though this *koto* is spoken by Thou by means of her voice, the *koto* itself is communally retained between I and Thou."[139] Thus meeting is always a meeting of speaking or communicating beings.

Now we are faced with the task of fleshing out the meaning of different forms or modes of "communication," and the place of speech in particular. For this we shall turn again to Tanabe. At one point in *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, Tanabe speaks of the Zen *kōan* in terms of understanding that "the way of satori is not ethical in nature but remains at the everyday level," but he adds that the "flaw" in this conception of the *kōan* is that "history, as objective and common 'social reality'," is bypassed, and thus too is "ethical seriousness." In short, by use of methods like the *kōan*, Zen neglects "the objective historical world whose being should be 'being as *upāya*.'" In contrast, Tanabe suggests that *metanoesis* "views ethics as the '*kōan* of reality,'" and thus "metanoetics is philosophy conscious of the foundation of history."[140] This requires some reflection. What does it mean to

137 Watsuji, *Rinrigaku*, pp. 10–11.

138 Ibid., p. 11.

139 Ibid., p. 77.

140 Tanabe, *Metanoetics*, p. 131.

say that "ethics is the *kōan* of reality"? For Tanabe, the *kōan*, while significant for its shock-value—its dispositional-transfigurative capacity—also must bring one "back to the world"; in the *kōan* words are "skillful means" to provoke *satori*/conversion. Thus, too, ethics must involve "mediation" by way of "skillful means"—actions, words (and perhaps symbols and myths)—which draw one out of and at the same time ground one in the world.

However, in what appears to be an attempt to distance his own theories from the "aesthetic intuitionism" of those he criticizes (i.e., Nishida), Tanabe ultimately falls back on the notion that ethics must take "rational discrimination as its medium."[141] "[Nishida's] aesthetic consideration," he says, "does not serve to overcome the abstraction of intuition but is a mere development and extension of intuitionism. It neglects the deeper significance of the role of the axis in absolute transformation."[142] It appears that "aesthetic" intuitionism here implies the sort of contemplation where one is "lost" in the totality,[143] without bothering to "return" to the world of mediated beings. He criticizes both the Zen sage and the Daoist hermit for advancing no further than "aesthetic enjoyment … despite their best efforts to transcend the ethical, [they] can only end up in a state of nature that is in fact sub-ethical." "The result is simply an intuition similar to artistic creativity, and therefore distinct from the faith-in-practice of Zen."[144] Instead, Tanabe is very much concerned with upholding the Kierkegaardian "paradoxical" (or oscillating) dialectic over the Hegelian synthesizing/sublating one. His critique of Nishida is also extended onto Schelling and Böhme, whose *Ungrund* differs from Nothingness in being a) unmediated and b) allied with a principle of nondifferentiation.[145] Tanabe's analysis and self-distancing from the Nishidan "aesthetic" stance presupposes that *aesthesis* involves a kind of *a priori* relationship between a subject and object, rather than a relationship between beings and "objects" in a community, one that entails the capacity for change and development. It also assumes that artistic creativity and "aesthetic intuition" of experience involves only a vertical connection between mind and form, subject and art-object; and that this integration of experience will be ultimately solipsistic and totalizing. Here Tanabe mentions his debt to Plato (whom he prefers to Plotinus), suggesting that he "shall adhere to a standpoint of the self-consciousness of action-faith that follows Plato in proscribing aesthetic contemplation," even while criticizing many other aspects of Plato's work as insufficiently "concrete."[146] However, a perspective of *aesthesis*

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141 Ibid., p. 155.

142 Ibid., p. 11.

143 Ibid., p. 171.

144 Ibid., p. 56. See Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Ch'an / Zen Buddhism* (Princeton, 1991) for a critique of the "rhetoric of immediacy" within Zen.

145 Ibid., pp. 141–3.

146 Tanabe, *Metanoetics*, p. 89; see also p. 264, where he associates aesthetic enjoyment with "pleasure," hedonism, and elitism.

may well recognize the significance of mediation with greater perspicuity than other forms of prehension or awareness, in part because art and beauty are always already characterized by mediation of the "absolute" in "empty forms," such as words, symbols, or rituals. In short, Tanabe's (Platonic) rejection of beauty and art—his *anaesthesia*—reflects a simplistic understanding of *aesthesis*, whereby concepts such as the "sublime"—which involves a discrimination of non-discrimination, prompted by an awesome Other-power and leading to a complete transformation of subjectivity—and the intersubjective aspect of artistic activity are not addressed.

The term *aesthesis* (lit., a perceiving) denotes "the perception of the external world by the senses." The derivation "aesthetic" was first understood as "things perceptible by the senses, things material" but, by virtue of Baumgarten's appropriation in his *Aesthetica* (1750) the term came to imply matters of taste and beauty. This "misuse" was protested by, among others, Kant, who insisted that aesthetics refer solely to "the science which treats of the conditions of sensuous perception."[147] However, in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Kant effectively collapsed both senses of the term into one. Thus *aesthesis* came to signify creative activity (non-teleological, and non-cognitive) as well as a kind of discriminating awareness (of the perceptive, that is, material and corporeal sort). It also bears noting that one of the roots of *aesthesis* is *thesis*/*thetic*, which implies "placement," or "position," and derives from the Indo-European root *de*-, which gave birth to both the English "theory" and "do." Thus aes-*thetic* activity involves a dis-*position* in the way that Tanabe's meta-*noesis* involves an after-*thinking*.

Ultimately, the significance of Watsuji's work and commitment to aesthetics emerges most clearly at the level of philosophical anthropology and the attempt to clarify a "social ontology of existence." Watsuji makes explicit reference in his aesthetic writings to traditional Japanese art forms, such as the tea ceremony (*chanoyu*) and linked verse (*renga*). These are of value precisely because of the particular way in which they express the interdependence of individuals in creation and artistic experience.[148] Unlike the high Romantic conception of the artist/genius as the solitary *maudit* in the manner of Faust or Byron, but very much in line with the "classical" Romantics following Schiller's (mis)reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, Watsuji is concerned to evoke a paradigm of aesthetic "play" which is at the same time removed from "frivolity" and solipsism; and which is located in social space.

For all of their debts to Marxism, both Watsuji and Tanabe recognized serious flaws in Marxist philosophical anthropology. Watsuji in particular criticizes the reductionist notion of *homo oeconomicus*: "Human beings (unlike animals) forge relationships and develop language and consciousness … the most basic criterion of human existence is the formation of relationships between self and others, and

[147] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, I.I.§1.

[148] The character *gen* (pronounced *ma* when understood as an artistic/spiritual ideal) is a key term in Japanese aesthetics, signifying "betweenness."

the assumption of a certain attitude as posture in order to accomplish that."[149] In order to nuance this vision of human nature, Watsuji turned to the writings of various *doyen*s of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century social theory: Gumplowicz, Durkheim, Scheler, Tarde, Wiese, and Simmel. However, being ultimately convinced that these thinkers (like Heidegger after them) were unable to rid themselves of commitment to an atomistic (and Judeo-Christian) philosophical anthropology, Watsuji missed a central theme to the work of Georg Simmel (1858–1918)—one that appears to have relevance to his own philosophico-religious ethics: *sociability*. In *The Sociology of Sociability* (1910), Simmel defines this term as the social counterpart of play as well as of art. Just as play and art "draw their form from … realities but leave … reality behind them," sociability "makes up its substance from numerous fundamental forms of serious relationship among men, a substance, however, spared the frictional realities of real life." Sociability so conceived, as the "sociological play-form," is beyond utility—it is an end in itself. "[S]ociability distils … out of the realities of social life the pure essence of association, of the associative process as a value and a satisfaction."[150]

This concept has deep roots within the European Romantic tradition, and especially in the writings of Friedrich Schiller, whose *The Aesthetic Education of Man* (1801) attempts to work out the implications and possibilities of an "aesthetic" approach to "enlightenment." The very meaning of the term "aesthetic" was extended by Schiller; no longer tied to works of art and their creation or reception, *aesthesis* applied to any thing—or person—that could be conceived as "living form" (or perhaps, being-in-the-world); moreover, the appreciation or awareness of living form implies a modality of the entire being—a *metanoesis* which is itself *aesthesis*.[151] The play concept is foundational in Schiller's work, not only for art but for "the much more difficult art of living," and his examples are drawn from life, especially the life of human relationship (being-with; caring-for). Play is conceived by Schiller as the "third drive" which will reconcile the other fundamental drives: towards change (senses) and towards changelessness or order (reason). Rather than annulling or sublating these two, the play drive is a kind of "reciprocal subordination" of or oscillation between them. "The play-drive, therefore, would be directed towards annulling time within time, reconciling becoming with absolute being and change with identity … [it] will endeavour so to receive as if it had itself brought forth, and to bring forth as the intuitive sense aspires to receive."[152] E.M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby suggest that, in this

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[149] Quoted in Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity*, p. 104.

[150] Ibid., p. 187.

[151] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters* (Oxford, 1982), p. 101.

[152] Ibid., pp. 3–4.

light, "it would not … be at all inapt to compare [Schiller's] 'third drive' … to, say, the opening of the 'Third Eye' in Zen Buddhism."[153]

The above discussion of the place of *aesthesis* and the ontology of sociability leads us back to reflect upon the meaning of the Zen maxim regarding the "emptiness of emptiness" (Jp. *kū ga kū zoru* / Sk. *śūnyāta śūnyāta*). This teaching can be interpreted in a number of ways. Abe Masao reads it as indicating that "true Emptiness is wondrous Being, absolute *u*, fullness and suchness of everything, *tathāgata*, ultimate reality."[154] Abe's paean to the plenitude of vacuity, while not necessarily invalid, is deepened by a slightly different—we might say pragmatic—understanding of *śūnyāta śūnyāta*, such that it implies the emptiness of the *realization* of emptiness itself. In short, emptiness upheld (*realized*) as a doctrine or an element of cognition must be further *real*-ized in the "experience" of emptiness in the physical/phenomenal world.[155] Moreover, this "experience" is not beyond language or conception, though it may not be exhausted by these modes of "revelation." Here "true" emptiness is the oscillation/mediation of nothingness-being, concretized, made real, in the *aesthesis-aidagara* of beings-in-the-world. In order for compassion or care to be more than empty abstractions, mediation is necessary, and mediation implies a horizontality to the relationship of beings or living forms. Thus the horizontal aspect of *śūnyāta śūnyāta* runs against the strictly vertical tendency of *ōsō*-centrism/*topos*, without sliding into the anaesthetic temptations of the Cartesian (or Critical Buddhist) "topophobia."

The difference rests in the horizontal nature (or rather three-dimensional nature) of the active relationship, as opposed to the two-dimensional nature of the merely contemplative/intuitive one. Perhaps this is indeed a "third aperture"—an aesthetic-ethical one grounded in the absolute nothingness of mediated betweenness, rather than the immediate *basho* of self—conceived as an experience of *gen*/*ma* which draws *kū* back onto itself.[156] Here "disinterestedness" (Gr. *Seinlassen*) does not imply passivity, contemplative serenity, or an intuitionist/topical merger of subject-object but rather a kind of (critical, non-instrumental) distancing that still upholds the fundamental betweenness of living forms in intersubjective space (Gr. *Öffentlichkeit*); one that refuses the tendency of emptiness or nothingness to collapse upon itself.

In this section, by utilizing the most important philosophico-religious tropes of Watsuji Tetsurō *vis-à-vis* some key concepts of Martin Heidegger and Tanabe Hajime, among others, I have drawn out the ethical implications of various conceptions of "fundamental ontology." Critical Buddhists insist that Nishida,

[153] Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby, "Introduction," in Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters* (Oxford, 1982), p. xcvi.

[154] Abe Masao, "Non-Being and *Mu*: The Metaphysical Nature of Negativity in the East and the West," *Religious Studies*, 11/2 (1975): pp. 187–8.

[155] See Richards, "*Śūnyatā*," p. 260.

[156] See Odin, "The Social Self," p. 482; LaFleur, "Buddhist Emptiness," p. 249.

Nishitani, and Tanabe (and by extension, Watsuji) are complicit in the devastation wrought by Japan on its own and other peoples during the first half of this century. This critique is primarily an ethical one, driven by considerations of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Kyoto School tropes like the *logic of place*, *absolute self-identity of contradictions*, *absolute mediation*, and *metanoetics*. The "ethical" critique, however, ultimately hinges on a particular understanding of the use of language and the meaning of mediation, expounded in the Critical Buddhist exaltation of *critica* over *topos*. In developing the concept of *aesthesis* out of Watsujian ethical theory, I have suggested an alternative vantage-point from which to understand Kyoto School—and perhaps Zen—"ethics" more generally. In order to further this constructive analysis, however, we must return to the problem of criticism, and the way such has been understood in Buddhist tradition.

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Chapter 4
Criticism as Anamnesis

> Since Buddhism is not a monotheistic religion … in Buddhism the active refusal of allowing others to have beliefs different from one's own is absent, while the positive recognition and approval of others' beliefs … is clearly present … In Buddhism, deep faith and true tolerance do not exclude one another but go together … The basic Buddhist attitude toward different beliefs within Buddhism is not to reject, denounce, or punish them as heresy, but rather to evaluate them critically as different views and to subsume them into its own doctrinal system.
>
> Abe Masao, *Zen and Comparative Studies*, pp. 203–4

> Overcoming the tradition, "going beyond" it, differing from it—these are the [Buddhist] tradition's own demands, not something counter to it or outside its parameters. Simply to agree with the tradition, to obey its current form, is to fail to receive the "transmission." It is to be "ungrateful" as the *Transmission of the Lamp* put it. This form of reflection can only derive from a deep sense of historicity; it implies the radically temporal thesis that who we are as human beings is historical through and through. History is conceived here not so much as a force that acts upon our human existence but rather as something closer at hand, something beyond which we will not go. It is true that only a few exceptional Buddhists were ever willing to face this realization in a thorough-going way. Most preferred to apply it to things of "this world" but not of the transcendent realm of Buddhas, nirvanas, and mind-to-mind transmission.
>
> Dale Wright, *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism*, pp. 155–6

These two quotations come to the same general conclusion about Buddhist attitudes towards tradition. And yet, they are instructive as points of contrast in that they address the issue from radically different perspectives and with markedly different intent. In reading Abe's remarks on how Buddhism has no problem fusing "deep belief and complete tolerance," one wonders about the fulminations of past masters like Dōgen and Nichiren, who were quick to pronounce upon the evil doctrines of the various "dog-heretics" who shared not even "one speck of the Dharma" with true believers.[1] We might also note the condescension in Abe's following claim, however truthful: "Different views of the Dharma have been regarded as *upāya*, skillful means to lead immature

[1] See Dōgen's harsh words describing the people of Japan in the "Keisei sanshoku" (Sounds of the Valley Streams, Colours of the Mountains) section of *Shōbōgenzō* (G. 9); Thomas Cleary (ed.), *Rational Zen: The Mind of Dōgen Zenji* (Boston and London, 1993), p. 29; Eidō Shimano and Charles Vachon (trs), *Dōgen: Shōbōgenzō busshō* (Paris, 2002), p. 527.

Buddhists to the ultimate truth of Buddha-nature."[2] Certainly, Buddhist writings often emphasize the dangers of contention (Sk. *vivāda*) and controversy (Sk. *raṇa*). Śākyamuni himself is often called the "one who cast aside contention" (Sk. *raṇamjaha*).[3] Yet this rhetoric of inclusion belies a significant legacy of division and contention, not all of it amicable, within Buddhist traditions across Asia. Cheerful talk about Buddhist tolerance towards other religions often manifests itself in the contention—now largely put to rest—that, unlike other world religions, and especially Christianity and Islam, the history of Buddhism is clean of the taint of "holy war."

In contrast to Abe's happy vision of peace and (paternalistic) tolerance, Dale Wright's remarks raise a dilemma that must be more clearly acknowledged. If this realization of "historicity" on the part of Buddhists is, indeed, an aspect of Buddhist tradition—a part of its "truth"—and if, indeed, only a few "exceptional" Buddhists have ever realized this truth, then what, exactly, is the problem with ordinary Buddhists? How or why should we consider this turn to historical consciousness a Buddhist truth at all? Certainly, it might be justified as properly Buddhist with reference to certain classical texts such as the writings of Huang Po (Jp. Ōbaku, ?–849), the subject of Wright's own work. Yet, as Wright admits, the bulk of the tradition extending up to, and perhaps culminating in, modern Zen points to a quite different understanding—one which seems to pull back from the void to which this radical historicity leads.

The problem of a Buddhist interpretation of history and self-understanding of Buddhist tradition has a number of levels. First is the issue of syncretism and borrowing, discussed above. Despite claims that Japanese Buddhists have always accepted other religious teachings, absorbing them into a seamless web, one can in fact find much criticism of the foreign or extra-Buddhist elements that seeped into, and possibly deformed, Buddhism in China and Japan. A reluctance to accept external currents is clear in the writings of Dōgen:

> Careless people claim that Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism are ultimately one, only the entrances are different. Or they say that those teachings are like a tripod. That kind of view is often heard among the monks of the Great Sung China. If they hold such opinions the Buddha Dharma has already disappeared from the earth for them. Even a speck of dust of the Buddha Dharma cannot be found among that type of stupid people.[4]

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[2] Abe Masao, *Zen and Comparative Studies* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 204.

[3] In addition to Shōtoku's Seventeen Article Constitution, discussed above, see also the *Man'yōshū*, an ancient collection of Japanese poetry in which Japan is referred to as "a country where people following implicitly the way of the gods, are not argumentative" (Abe, *Zen and Comparative Studies*, p. 246). This is an odd remark, given the argumentative nature of a number of the *kami* of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*.

[4] G. 24, "Bukkyō."

At another level, somewhat more abstract but significant nonetheless, at stake here is the very conception of "tradition" itself—including the meaning and implications of following tradition in the "modern" world. "Progressive" moderns, following the Enlightenment, usually contrast tradition with reason and human freedom, limiting tradition to the pejorative sense of a ratification of the past, with little room for what is "new." And yet, as Muramoto Shōji argues, the term itself contains a broader, and somewhat more positive implication. Coming from the Latin *tradere* (lit., to hand over), tradition includes "something that is handed over as well as the activity of handing it over. Both these connotations of tradition are related and form a hermeneutic circle. A tradition is transmitted from one generation that gives to a generation that receives."[5] Muramoto goes on to argue that this process of handing over can only take place where there is an acceptance on the part of both givers and receivers, and that in Buddhism tradition is not absolutely immutable.

> There is a concept not only of *dempō*, the transmission of the Buddha dharma, but also of *dampō*, its interruption. A Zen master sees his historical mission in the transmission of the Buddhist truth … [Yet, i]n case he cannot find a suitable successor he might prefer *dampō* to *dempō*, the authenticity of which would be not questionable. Tradition is thus essentially a historical process and presupposes man's reason and responsibility to choose freely … Even a refusal of the tradition remains partly dependent on historical reality which in itself is constituted by the tradition.[6]

This is a potentially fruitful insight for Critical Buddhism. For Muramoto, as for Wright, Gadamer, and even, to some degree, Jürgen Habermas, "awakening" to historical consciousness involves a thoroughgoing commitment to truly understanding the tradition in its particular historical, social, and political context, as well as an attempt to relate the tradition to present-day realities.[7] Furthermore, as Wright notes:

> A successful text must be just as impermanent over time and place as its readers. To regret this impermanence and the "dependent origination" of Huang Po over time is to miss the Buddhist point. Indeed, the entire Buddhist tradition councils explicitly against this regret. Since all grounds are fluid and all priorities already

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5 Muramoto Shōji, "Tradition and Modernity in Interreligious Dialogue," *Zen Buddhism Today*, 4 (1986): p. 17.

6 Ibid.

7 See Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York, 1961), where the present is conceived as in a state of suspended animation between the remembrance of past tragedy and the hope of a more humane future; also James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews, A History* (Boston, 2002), pp. 62–3.

> dependent, grasping for secure foundations and stable originals can only be misguided—and painful.[8]

Griffith Foulk makes a similar point with respect to Chan/Zen and the *kōan* tradition, in which "the authority of the commenting voice … derives from the dialectic of negation, according to which even the words of the patriarchs are fundamentally flawed and in need of rebuttal lest someone cling to them as ultimately meaningful expressions of truth."[9] In short, Critical Buddhism's outright rejection of authority betrays an Enlightenment prejudice that must be nuanced by a closer reading of the meaning of authority within Zen and Buddhist tradition.[10]

Rather than being opposed to the "truths" passed on by tradition, the existential-critical process may be better conceived in terms of Foucault's notion of genealogy or even, as Muramoto prefers, in terms of *apologia* and *anamnesis*:

> An apology is not always a sign of stagnation or rigidity. Sometimes it may prove to be a highly self-critical and promising act which revives the tradition and helps man's commitment … Apology is *anamnesis*, i.e., the recollection of what a tradition may have forgotten in the long course of its history. This is why traditional religions now, while taking a critical stance to modernity, have to integrate findings offered by philological, historical, psychological and sociological research instead of merely ignoring them in defense. For traditional religions, in as much as they still claim fundamental rights in the contemporary world, it is of extraordinary importance to show that problems posed by the critical modern mind can be appropriately resolved on the basis of their own understanding.[11]

Indeed, the very gap between a particular tradition and the contemporary world can be a source for progressive critique. However, it can also be, and perhaps more often is, a source for "conservative hysteresis," namely when tradition does not include tools for critical reflection.[12] A truly critical historicism accepts

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8 Dale S. Wright, *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 13–14.

9 Griffith Foulk, "The Form and Function of Koan Literature: A Historical Overview," in Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (eds), *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism* (New York, 2000) p. 35.

10 See Victor Sōgen Hori, "Liberal Education and the Teaching of Buddhism," in Victor Sōgen Hori, Richard P. Hayes and J. Mark Shields (eds), *Teaching Buddhism in the West: From the Wheel to the Web* (London and New York, 2002)," pp. 190–93; also Georges Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk* (Los Angeles, 2003), for an extended discussion of Tibetan Buddhist scholasticism in terms of a dynamic relation between authority and interpretation.

11 Muramoto Shōji, "Tradition and Modernity in Interreligious Dialogue," *Zen Buddhism Today*, 4 (1986): p. 18.

12 Robert John Ackermann, *Religion as Critique* (Amherst, 1985), p. 86.

the historical embeddedness of all our thoughts, including our semantic and interpretive frameworks. Such a post-Romantic hermeneutics may also conform to Buddhist practice on a number of levels. As Wright notes, just as Karl Barth (1886–1968) argued for Christianity, so too must a Zen master "read the 'times', a set of historical developments and circumstances—political, economic, and cultural—within which the transmission of mind and dharma must be performed."[13] Any attempt to disclose a pure meaning in ancient texts must be given up as both illusory and contrary to transmission.

And yet, we are still faced with the problem that very few Zen or other Buddhist thinkers have actually utilized such a method or displayed such historical consciousness. Wright alludes to the "weakness of Zen historical consciousness," which lies in its ready acceptance and promotion of continuity (via lineage) based on an idealized vision of the past. As such, the "Zen historian has no perspective from which the present can be criticized, other than that of the present itself, which can only take the form of chastisement for a failure to live up to the current ideals."[14] Much of this can be attributed to simple politics: those in power will always prefer the status quo. But it would be too simplistic to take power as the sole factor in Zen conservatism. Another element is authority in a more general sense, which also, *pace* Wright's vision of a constantly reforming Zen line, tends to prefer stability and continuity to renewal and transformation. Whatever the reasons, the result is that Zen has tended to lack a historical consciousness in precisely the sense that any transformations and disruptions that actually did occur have been glossed over or forgotten entirely. In short: "The ideological work of the tradition has been to hide the diversity and contingency of its origins behind an apparent consensus of orthodoxy."[15] Thus the problem of a lack of Zen historicity is not simply a matter of Zen writers deliberately or subconsciously distorting the facts—since the very notion of non-interpretive, objective, "fact" has come under serious question. It is rather a pragmatic problem of the blockage of an embedded critical component related to overcoming injustice and promoting compassion, along with related ideals emerging out of the various Buddhist traditions.

In the philosophical and religious work of the Kyoto School, we see both an attempt to give an important place to historical reality as well as a persistent drive towards the abstraction of history and historicity—the reduction of history to some larger, transcendent category, such as absolute nothingness or emptiness.[16] According to Nishitani: "Historicity is able to realize itself radically only on the

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[13] Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, p. 39.

[14] Ibid., p. 114.

[15] Faure Bernard, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Ch'an / Zen Buddhism* (Princeton, 1991), p. 16.

[16] See James W. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School* (Honolulu, 2001), pp. 85–6, for a critique of Nishida's attempt to concretize his thought in history and society.

standpoint of *śūnyatā* …. Each individual moment of unending time possesses the very same solemnity that is thought in Christianity to be possessed by the special moments of the creation, fall, redemption, and second coming."[17] Here time itself is brought to its fullness only in what we might call the eternal now, the Real Present of an epoch or a moment. The sense of history and the past as mediation of the present and future, by way of *pratītya-samutpāda*, as well as the potential for critical engagement on the basis of such, is lost in Nishitani's all-enveloping "bottomless embrace."[18]

Often the attempt to historicize a religious tradition involves a consequent demythologizing, which sometimes corresponds to a impulse we might call "rationalist fundamentalism." Indeed, there is a demythologizing intent on the part of Critical Buddhism, a sense that Buddhism needs to be purified of cultural accretions, particularly those of the topicalist variety, whether they come from Indian, Chinese, Japanese, or Western sources. However, this may simply be reflective of religious reformism more generally or, as Wright has argued, even a particular characteristic of Zen. More important is a deep historical (here, including political) consciousness among the participants of a religious tradition. Among other things, Buddhism—as any religion—must be evaluated in terms of its historical effects (Gr. *Wirkungsgeschichte*). In short, the development of a truly critical historiography may require that we heave off the attempt to make one dimension of time exempt from the negativity of historical limits that have affixed themselves to both Buddhist and modern Western methods.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, in invoking Vico and the Romantics against the Enlightenment rationalists, upholds tradition as a legitimate and binding form of authority, which lies behind and provides the foundation for morals. His thesis rests on the notion that the Romantic rejection of Enlightenment objectivity is actually a flipside of the Enlightenment, in the sense that Romanticism replaces the Enlightenment quest for perfect knowledge with a focus on a perfect consciousness prior to all human thought. Thus Romanticism, too, calls for an elimination of "prejudice." What needs to be explained is the possibility of a ground for ethics which lies neither with tradition alone nor with reason alone. This is precisely the path opened by Vico and re-opened, however unconsciously and unwittingly, by Critical Buddhism. Gadamer comes close to articulating this when he says: "*Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition*, a process of transmission in which past and present are

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[17] John Maraldo, "Questioning Nationalism Then and Now: A Critical Approach to Zen and the Kyoto School," in James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo (eds), *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu, 1994), p. 361; original in Nishitani Keiji, *Nishitani Keiji-sha sakushū* (Tokyo, 1986–), volume 10, p. 299; for an alternative translation, see Nishitani Keiji, *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism* (Albany, 1990), p. 272.

[18] See Huh Woo-Sung, "Philosopher of History in the 'Later' Nishida: A Philosophic Turn," *Philosophy East and West*, 40/3 (1990): pp. 354, 357.

constantly mediated."[19] This aspect of mediation in the "event" is the locus of the present study, and a potential bridge between the religio-cultural divide.

At first glance, it might appear that the brand of criticism or "criticalism" endorsed by Hakamaya and Matsumoto is little more than a thinly-disguised liberal humanism based on Enlightenment rationality, the acceptance of a modern Western ideal of human rights, and the priority of individual agency. As such, Critical Buddhism might be seen as little more than a belated Westernizing reaction to the perceived irrationalism and nationalism of the early twentieth century. Hakamaya in particular is quite clear as to the depth of his commitment to philosophical models of European Enlightenment. But the issue is not so geographically polarized as it may first appear. In attempting to lay the groundwork for what it means to be truly critical, Hakamaya describes an opposition with a 300-year legacy in Western thought, that between the criticalism of René Descartes and the topicalism of Giambattista Vico, the seventeenth-century Neapolitan jurist and philosopher. As he explains in "Critical Philosophy versus Topical Philosophy": "The heart of the intellectual question … lies not in the different ways of thought of East and West, but rather in the confrontation between *topica* and *critica*."[20] This simple assertion is key to a deeper understanding of the movement. Regarding the temptation to see essential differences in terms of East versus West, John Dower makes a point regarding the struggle to recreate a postwar constitution for Japan: though the Kiplingesque trump card was played on more than one occasion by Japanese legal scholars, in fact the whole debate was really centered on a conflict between "two Western systems of legal thinking"—one German and one Anglo-American.[21] The point made by Critical Buddhism is the same: the rhetoric of the chasm between East and West, whether on metaphysical, ethical or psychological grounds, is more often than not a mask covering deeper, more fundamental issues. It is, we might say, a political exploitation of "difference." In short, comparison and fundamental distinctions run cross-traditionally to a much greater degree than in the philosophy practiced by the Kyoto School. Hakamaya and Matsumoto insist that they are not simply importing Western rationalism as the new way of doing Buddhism; they claim that their assault on topicalism is one with which the Buddha himself would be in sympathy.[22] Indeed, they go so far as

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[19] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York, 1988), p. 296 (emphasis in original).

[20] Hakamaya Noriaki, "Critical Philosophy versus Topical Philosophy," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 58; original: Hakamaya Noriaki, *Hihan bukkyō* [Critical Buddhism] (Tokyo, 1990), p. 7.

[21] John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York, 1999), p. 353.

[22] Hakamaya calls Śākyamuni Buddha "the first such criticalist in India," though he goes on to laud Confucius ("China's Christ") over both Laozi and Śākyamuni, seeing the former as more of a humanist than the other two: "It is humankind that can broaden the

to suggest that Buddhism began as a revolt against topicalism in Indian thinking and has had ever since to perform rearguard battle against topical encroachments, with varied success. This historical battle is conceived by Hakamaya in terms of the contrasting Sanskrit terms *pratyakṣa* (Jp. *genken*, "direct perception") and *anumāna* (Jp. *hiryō*, "deductive reasoning," "inference," recognition of causes) and waged by, for example, the Mādhyamika versus Yogācārin essentialism, Dōgen, and the Critical Buddhists themselves against Japanese "postmodernists" and heirs of the Kyoto School.[23] "[E]ven more quickly than Vico followed on the heels of Descartes, advocates of a topical philosophy reappeared throughout Indian Buddhism and eviscerated Śākyamuni's true criticism."[24] Before discussing the work of Descartes as a foundation for criticalism, let us turn to a brief history of criticism within Buddhism and Zen traditions.

N.P. Jacobson points to the power of Buddhism to "shift the conduct of life away from established beliefs, however reliable and legitimate, over to the self-corrective mode of behaviour"—being alert to what Wittgenstein called "the bewitchment of the intellect by language."[25] Christmas Humphreys, in a similar vein, suggests a strong parallel between the Buddhist attitude towards all phenomena and that of the modern scientist: "Let all things be examined dispassionately, objectively, assuming nothing, testing all, for such was the Buddha's own injunction to his followers."[26] The notion that Buddhism began as a type of critical philosophical movement, akin to that begun by fellow Axis Age thinkers Socrates and Plato, has been around for some time.[27] Eight decades ago Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975) wrote the following about the beginnings of Indian philosophy:

> The age of Buddha (596–483 BC) [sic] represents the great springtide of philosophical spirit in India. The progress of philosophy is generally due to a powerful attack on a historical tradition when men feel themselves compelled to go back on their steps and raise once more the fundamental questions which their fathers had disposed of by the older schemes. The revolt of Buddhism and Jainism … forms an era in the history of Indian thought, since it finally exploded the method of dogmatism and helped to bring about the critical point-of-view. For the great Buddhist thinkers, logic was the main arsenal where were forged

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dao, not the *dao* that broadens humankind" (L. 15:28); Hakamaya Noriaki, "Scholarship as Criticism," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), pp. 64–7; see Mark 2:27 for a Christian parallel.

23 See Yamaguchi Zuihō, "The Core Elements of Indian Buddhism Introduced into Tibet: A Contrast with Japanese Buddhism," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), for a discussion of the meaning of wisdom *vis-à-vis* the "confirmation of truth" (Sk. *pratyavekṣa*).

24 Hakamaya, "Scholarship as Criticism," p. 64.

25 N.P. Jacobson, *Buddhism and the Contemporary World: Change and Self-Correction* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1983), p. 133.

26 Christmas Humphreys, *The Buddhist Way of Action* (London, 1951), p. 223.

27 See Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (London, 1953), p. 51.

> the weapons of universal destructive criticism … The conservative schools were compelled to codify their views and set forth logical defenses of them. The critical side of philosophy became as important as the speculative.[28]

While it is very difficult if not impossible to know precisely what early Buddhism "really was," most contemporary buddhologists are skeptical of Radhakrishnan's claims. For the most part they have accepted the scholarly conclusion that originary Buddhism was not, at least in the very beginning, a highly philosophical movement, but rather seems to have been more concerned with ascetic renunciation and the worship of *stūpa*s. It has been suggested that the turn from Pali to Sanskrit as the dominant linguistic medium involved a turn towards philosophical speculation, heightened by the writings of philosophers such as Nāgārjuna. Whatever the case, it is clear that from a relatively early period Buddhists have been engaged in forms of critical analysis of the beliefs, practices, and ideas surrounding them—including those that came before as part of the inherited "tradition." It is also clear that this critical dimension remained with Buddhism even as it crossed the Sea of Japan.

Despite scholars such as Byron Earhart who insist rather too strongly on harmony within Japanese religious history, there has in fact been a long tradition of dispute and outright criticism within both Chinese and Japanese thought traditions.[29] In the Buddhist context, this critical tradition was even given a formal name. Whenever a new sect arose in China and Japan, the practice of *kyōsō-hanjaku* (Ch. *jiaoxiang panzhai*)—"the judgement and interpretation of the various facets of Buddhist teachings"—was applied. According to Abe, this practice was highly beneficial to Buddhist development, in that it allowed for the application of new standards to various sutras and interpretations of texts and traditions.[30] Thus the emergence of Chan/Zen, highlighting meditation over teaching, can be seen as a prominent instance of a "critical Buddhist" movement that sought, through emphasis of one aspect of received tradition at the expense of all others, to go straight to the heart (though not necessarily the historical origins) of Buddhism. Not only was a new form of Buddhism established, all other existing forms were immediately rendered suspect. Zen is, of course, just one example; we might also note the Zhenyan/Shingon differentiation of esoteric (*mikkyō*) and exoteric (*kenkyō*) Buddhism as well as the Jingtu/Jōdo privileging of the other-power gate (*tariki-mon*) versus the self-power gate (*jiriki-mon*), and Nichiren's insistence that everything you need to know about the Dharma can be found in the *Lotus Sutra*.[31]

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[28] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (London, 1931), p. 17.

[29] See Byron Earhart, *Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity* (Belmont, 1982), p. 70; and Charles Moore, "Introduction," in Charles Moore (ed.), *The Japanese Mind* (Honolulu, 1982), p. 302, for an opposing view.

[30] Abe, *Zen and Comparative Studies*, p. 16.

[31] Though still commonly asserted, the notion of a widespread Kamakura Buddhist "Reformation" (e.g., Moore, "Introduction," p. 11) along the lines of the Protestant Reformation in Christianity—including a bias towards the previous Tendai establishment

The search for true Buddhism has a long and storied pedigree in Japan. Only a critical, reformist spirit could have prompted such as Kūkai and Saichō to undertake the arduous journey to China in search of the true path to supplant what was in their eyes the decrepitude of the various forms of Nara Buddhism. As Earhart notes, both of these men as well as later Buddhist reformers sought not only "true" Buddhism but also "truly Japanese" Buddhism, generally conflating these two goals. All this being said, it comes as little surprise to find that the major Buddhist figure to which the Critical Buddhists point for precedence is Dōgen (1200–1253), the historical founder of the Sōtō Zen sect, to which both Hakamaya and Matsumoto belong. Thomas Cleary has argued that "Dōgen exploded the myth, popular then as now, that Zen awakening is an irrational process, thus laying a foundation for a more balanced and complete understanding of Buddhism."[32] Certainly Dōgen stands out as one of the great reformers in Japanese Buddhist tradition: he attempted to introduce into Japan what he believed to be true Buddhism, knowledge of which he gained while studying under Chinese Chan master Rujing (Jp. Nyojō, 1163–1228). The paradox, if we might call it so, of Dōgen's achievement is the following: he was, methodologically at least, a philosopher; works like his *Shōbōgenzō* (Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma) are replete with rational and critical speculation of a sophistication unrivaled in Japanese thought until the Meiji Era. Yet on another level his religious message was rigorously Occamite, in that all that is truly required is *zazen*—sitting meditation—in order to effect the "dropping off of body and mind."

Is it reasonable to call Dōgen a Critical Buddhist? Again, Hakamaya and Matsumoto have no hesitation in doing so, based largely on his work as a critic and reformer who was not averse to "discursive thinking." For Dōgen:

> written documentation of … personal, individual achievements of the past (including that of Śākyamuni himself), is not only possible but … highly useful for those seeking instruction in the way. Although Dōgen stressed the need to go beyond intellectual theory in achieving enlightenment, he nonetheless differed from the Rinzai sect's concentration on the kōan to the exclusion of studying the sutras … he argued for the integration of theory (study of the sutras) and practice (mainly sitting in meditation).[33]

Several arguments are significant here. First, the notion that in writing the *Fukanzazengi* Dōgen shifted his emphasis, moving away from the notion of *dhyāna* or *samadhi* as means to enlightenment and towards an "accentuation of the

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as being worldly and corrupt—has lately come under serious critique (see e.g., Jacqueline Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* [Honolulu, 2001], pp. 66–85).

[32] Cleary, *Rational Zen*, p. 36.

[33] H. Gene Blocker and Christopher L. Starling, *Japanese Philosophy* (Albany, 2001), p. 59.

oneness of practice and realization."[34] In addition, the idea that Dōgen explicitly rejected *hongaku* or original enlightenment theory. According to Maraldo:

> it is obvious from the connotations of the very titles *Bendōwa* ("Discourse on negotiating the Way," or on "Making endeavors to practice the Way") and *Gyōji* (maintaining one's course in "perpetual practice") that Dōgen does not lapse into the view, popular during this time in Japan, that since man is inherently enlightened (*hongaku*) there is no need for practice.[35]

Indeed, it might be argued that in Dōgen we find a Zen thinker who utilized a hermeneutic akin to that employed by those contemporary historians and thinkers sensitive to the interplay between texts and interpretation (or interpreters). Furthermore, unlike both the fundamentalist literalist and the objectivist historian, such a hermeneutical stance recognizes that "only when the past can legitimately make a claim to truth upon the present is it worth knowing."[36] Yet despite the strong evidence of critical reformism within Buddhist tradition, the centrality of criticism in Japanese culture and society more generally up until the present remains a matter of some debate.[37]

In order to more fully flesh out the concept of *critica*, let us turn now from the work of Dōgen to that of a second and vastly more surprising Critical Buddhist hero: René Descartes (1596–1650). It goes without saying that Cartesian thought has had a monumental impact on Western philosophy. Some would go further to argue that the modern age of the Western world can be viewed as Cartesianism writ large—though recent scholars such as Jean-Luc Marion and Geneviève Rodis-Lewis have attempted to disentangle Cartesianism from the work of Descartes himself.[38] Even those who have most forcefully and bitterly attacked the post-Cartesian paradigm of the disengaged self and critical objectivity have done so in recognition of its power and influence.

As Douglas Allen notes: "Most of our modern Western concepts of self have had Cartesian epistemological roots."[39] Allen goes on to delimit the main aspects of the modern Cartesian self:

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34 Norman Waddell and Abe Masao (trs), "Dōgen's Fukanzazengi," *The Eastern Buddhist, New Series*, 6/2 (1973), pp. 117–18; see also John C. Maraldo, "The Hermeneutics of Practice in Dōgen and Francis of Assisi: An Exercise in Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," *Eastern Buddhist, New Series*, 14/2 (1981): p. 30 n.19.

35 Maraldo, "The Hermeneutics of Practice," p. 43.

36 Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, pp. 113–14.

37 See, e.g., Blocker and Starling, *Japanese Philosophy*, p. 178.

38 See Jean-Luc Marion, *Sur l'ontologie grise de Descartes: Science cartésienne et savoir aristotélicien dans les 'Regulae'* (Paris, 1992); Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, *Descartes, His Life and Thought* (Ithaca, 1998).

39 Douglas Allen (ed.), *Culture and Self: Philosophical and Religious Perspectives, East and West* (Boulder, 1997), p. 7.

1. What is true is only what is “clear and distinct” to the rational mind—this results in a privileging of mind over body; the self is exhausted by the thinking mind;
2. The self is isolated, not social or relational; one comes to know the self independently of others; all relations to others are subjected to methodological doubt;
3. The thinking mind can be more certain of its own existence than the existence of anything else—this is the foundation of philosophy (and thinking, knowledge) as well as the ground of existence;
4. Since certainty is so closely connected to doubt, the self is threatened by a profound skepticism and the prospect of a self-imprisoned solipsism;
5. Knowledge of the self as a separate, autonomous thinking thing is *not* historically and culturally constructed.[40]

Allen’s conclusion, which nicely sums up most contemporary reactions to the Cartesian paradigm, is that: “such a modern, Western self-claim to ahistoric rationality and universal objectivity not only is philosophically inadequate but also serves neo-colonial and imperial goals of domination.”[41] Indeed, long before the advent of feminism and postcolonial criticism, early twentieth-century philosophy spent many pots of ink battling the lingering specter of Descartes. In his famous 1935 lectures in Vienna and Prague on the “Crisis of European Sciences and the Transcendental Phenomenology,” Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) located the very roots of the modern crisis in the figure of Descartes, as well as Galileo. Under their guidance, Husserl intoned, the European sciences were able to reduce the world to a mere object of technical and mathematical investigation. The concrete world of life (Gr. *die Lebenswelt*) was pushed out of sight, beyond the horizon of knowledge, and forgotten. Tunnel-vision set into the European mind, and the “real world” was lost.[42] Elided along with the world was the self, which was, unbeknownst to the Cartesian subject, in-the-world all along. Europeans and their American cousins had plunged headlong into what Husserl’s erstwhile pupil Heidegger would call the “forgetting of Being” (Gr. *Seinsvergessenheit*).

And yet, the reason it is impossible to fully forget about or deny the legacy of Descartes is the innovative and critical aspect that lies at the foundation of his work. Attempting, quite consciously, to restart philosophy in a fresh and new direction, Descartes rejected the Aristotelian and scholastic traditions that had been the foundations of Western thought for centuries. Like Vico after him,

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[40] Ibid., pp. 7–8.

[41] Ibid., p. 9.

[42] Before we make Husserl into a father of cultural pluralism, we must note that besides his critique of Western rationalism he also claimed that “the Europeanization of all foreign parts” is the “destiny of the Earth,” and that Western philosophy could encompass, but could never be encompassed by, the thought of the East; see Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston, 1970), pp. 273–5.

Descartes was particularly concerned to make philosophy come to terms with the burgeoning "new sciences," in part by breaking its longstanding reliance on Christian theology. The revolutionary character of these actions accounts for much of his continuing appeal, even today. Descartes founded his method on the basic principle of "hyperbolic doubt"—he found that he was able to doubt everything, until he came to what he believed was the only undoubtable—the very thing doing the doubting, i.e., the "self." From here, Descartes went on to construct a basis for knowledge, once doubting had showed itself to be radically illogical. Eventually, he would prove the existence of thinking, the mind (as distinct entity from the body), God, and the external world. He believed that this method was able to refute the skeptics, who believed knowledge was not possible, while allowing for a truly mathematical and scientific knowledge of the material world.

A quick summary of Descartes's four methodological rules will help us to understand why the Critical Buddhists find his work amenable:

1. Never to accept anything as true if I did not have evident knowledge of its truth; that is, carefully to avoid precipitate conclusions and preconceptions, and to include nothing more in my judgments than what presented itself to my mind so clearly that I had no occasion to doubt it;[43]
2. Divide each of the difficulties I examined into as many parts as possible and as may be required in order to resolve them better;
3. Direct my thoughts in an orderly manner, by beginning with the simplest and most easily known objects in order to ascend little by little, step by step, to knowledge of the most complex, and by supposing some order even among objects that have no natural order of precedence;
4. Last, throughout to make enumerations so complete, and reviews so comprehensive, that I could be sure of leaving nothing out.[44]

These four basic rules of the Cartesian method can be expressed in terms of three basic mental operations: intuition, deduction, and enumeration, which together make up human reason. Intuition implies the "direct apprehension" of the "simple natures" of any subject matter; deduction is a process of inferring necessary relations between these simple natures; and finally, enumeration is a review process by which we are able to correct for the shortcomings of human memory.

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[43] The *Kālāma Sutta* is frequently cited as evidence that the Buddha advised his followers not to accept particular views simply on the basis of tradition, text, or authority, but to investigate as fully as possible the validity of views for themselves; Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikku Bodhi (trs), *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: An Anthology of Suttas from the Anguttara Nikāya* (New York, 1999); but see David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhism Modernism* (New York, 2008), pp. 64–5 for a critique of this usage as a prime example of Buddhist modernism.

[44] Adapted from *Discourse on Method*, I.120, in René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Cambridge, 1991).

Let us look more closely at the notion of intuition at work here, since it relates to a concept employed by both Vico and Nishida but questioned by many contemporary thinkers as well as Critical Buddhism. For Descartes, coming to be "enlightened" about the world involves coming to realize (e.g., through meditation) that in fact, "bodies are not properly speaking known by the senses or by the faculty of the imagination, but by the understanding only, and … they are not known from the fact that they are seen or touched, but only because they are understood."[45] Descartes addresses the problem of clarity and distinctiveness in a number of works, including the *Principia Philosophiae* (Principles of Philosophy, 1644).[46] Clarity refers to an openness or presentation of the object for full inspection by the thinker; an analogy used by Descartes is viewing a material object in good light. Distinctness refers to the process of coming to an understanding of the relationships between the idea or object and everything else, in order to distinguish what belongs to the object and what does not, i.e., what makes up its relations. Clarity sounds very much like the Buddhist notion of *saṃjñā*, one of the five *skandha*s that refers to conceptual thinking and forms, as in Descartes, a basis for the idea of self—as well as, in a more positive sense for Buddhism, *dharma pravicaya* or discriminating wisdom. Distinctness echoes the Buddhist understanding of the mutual interdependence of phenomena, though it leans more strongly towards the possibility of independent, unrelated entities. In any case, intuition in this sense shares little in common with the more mystical understanding of some sort of pre-discursive illumination of "reality itself."

Throughout the *Meditations*, the key concern is with the first rule stated by Descartes: never to accept anything as true without evidence. Thus doubt is given pride of place. A Zen saying suggests that there are "three essentials" to the practice of Zen:

1. Great Faith;
2. Great Tenacity of Purpose; and
3. Great Doubt.

According to Hisamatsu it is the last that is the necessary moment for self-awakening. Could this be the "great doubt" of Descartes—of the famous *de omnibus dubitandum*? Abe Masao argues that it is not, since the Buddhist Great Doubt is total; i.e., it involves not only "intellectual doubting" but also "emotional anguish" and "volitional dilemma" such that ultimately "what is being doubted is the doubter himself."[47] And yet, there may be more to this connection than meets the eye.

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[45] Quoted in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 145.

[46] See *Principia Philosophiae*, I.45, in Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*; see also Leibniz, "Meditations on Knowledge, Truth and Ideas" (1684).

[47] Abe Masao, *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue* (Honolulu, 1995), pp. 170–71.

In both the *Discourse on Method* and the *Meditations*, Descartes proposes to follow a process of doubt as a "first principle" of thought. It is important to understand that Descartes's doubt is here not simply a skepticism of traditional myths or beliefs held on the basis of faith or authority—it is a much deeper, "hyperbolic" doubt, in which all sorts of knowledge, indeed, the very process of knowing and being itself—including the very existence of the self—are put in question. The goal, however, is not to rest within doubt but to find a bedrock of truths that cannot be themselves doubted. The most obvious class of knowledge brought into question by the Cartesian method is knowledge gained from the senses. By following this method, Descartes eventually came to the conclusion that the only thing that cannot be doubted, the only true certainty, is the "thinking thing"—"this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived by my mind."[48] This of course led him to state, in the famous summative phrase: *cogito ergo sum*. It is worth noting here that Descartes borrowed his strategy partly from St. Augustine (354–430), who developed his own "refutation" of the skeptics in *City of God*: "On none of these points do I fear the arguments of the skeptics of the Academy who say: what if you are deceived? For if I am deceived, I am. For he who does not exist cannot be deceived. And if I am deceived, by this same token I am."[49] This rather extraordinary passage can be read as a rebuke against the skeptics for not going further to question the whole prospect of deception versus true understanding.

A few points here require elaboration. First, Descartes does not suggest that thinking is the only attribute that he has, but rather makes the weaker claim that it is the only attribute about which he can be certain. Thus a better translation of the *cogito* might be: "I am, then, at the very least a thing that thinks." Second, Descartes "thinking thing" is not simply or purely a rational being: it is "a thing which doubts, understands, conceives, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels." These last two are particularly important, as they serve to undermine the common notion that Descartes was presenting a purely rational ego. Probably the biggest stumbling block for anti-Cartesians is the so-called "mind-body" dualism that he is said to have brought into not only Western thought but also the Western psyche. To begin, in the *Meditations*, Descartes employs two different words for "body": a) in the sense of *res extensa*; and b) the physical body itself. Further, much of what makes us human, according to Descartes, are things like imagination, sensation, purposeful movement, appetites, and emotions—which fall somewhere between pure mind and pure body. In fact, Descartes emphasizes this point: the immaterial mind or soul is not a "ghost in the machine"; though mind and body may be separable in principle, they are in fact "a close and intimate union."[50]

As Stuart Lachs writes in his critique of modernist versions of Zen: "Perhaps the greatest attraction of [this type of] Zen for Americans of [the postwar] period

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48 *Meditations*, II.17, in Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*.

49 Augustine, *City of God*, 11:26.

50 *Principles* §48, I, in Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*.

was the notion of pure, enlightened experience with its promise of epistemological certainty, attainable through systematic meditation training."[51] Here the prospect of certainty found in standard interpretations of Descartes slides imperceptibly into the modernist Zen quest for enlightenment as a pre-conceptual grasp of reality-as-it-is. Within Indian Buddhism (as well as Nyāya thought), a contrast was frequently made between two types of reason/thinking, *tarka* and *vāda*. Whereas the former refers to a kind of speculative thinking in which: a) there is no ground for certainty; or b) one is content with *a priori* assumptions and hearsay, the latter denotes the opposite: i.e., thinking that both contains the potential for certainty and proceeds without reliance on assumptions or hearsay. Of the two it is *vāda*, sounding suspiciously like Cartesian or even scientific rationality, that is overwhelmingly favored, while *tarka* is rejected. Ironically, many modern commentators have taken the rejection of *tarka* to refer to a blanket rejection of reason and logic, when one might argue that it is precisely the opposite: i.e., a blanket critique of dogmatic and unsubstantiated thinking.

Yet the principle that we might best adopt from Descartes is less the certainty of the *cogito* than the primacy of doubt, *dubito*, in thinking and understanding.[52] Indeed, the notion that certainty will eventually emerge from thinking and discussion is perhaps best left as an open question, not least because of the long tradition, beginning with the Mādhyamika (and Nāgārjuna in particular), of questioning any sort of certainty (Sk. *niścaya*) whatsoever. This is of course to reject a central element of Descartes's method, which, unlike the skeptics, seeks to eliminate doubt in order to stand on the firm ground of certainty. Yet, taking a cue from Descartes's wish to push doubt as far as possible, we might suggest that a further implication of radical doubt involves applying doubt to certainty itself, in order to find out that doubting one's own doubt amounts to sheer contradiction and documents therefore that the route called doubting is thus a logical dead end for thinking itself. As John Cottingham puts it: "the purpose is to see whether there is anything at all that *survives* the doubt."[53]

Indeed, in his well-known story of the demon, Descartes comes very close to making assertions of a highly Buddhistic nature regarding the possibility that everything is, in fact, empty of substantial existence: "I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, shapes, sounds and all eternal things are merely the delusions of dreams which [the demon] has devised to ensnare my judgement."[54] Yet, the certainty Descartes eventually arrives at and upon which all knowledge and existence is to be henceforth grounded also has a theological basis: "I see plainly that the certainty and truth of all knowledge depends uniquely on my awareness

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51 Stuart Lachs, "Coming Down from the Zen Clouds: A Critique of the Current State of American Zen." (Online, 1994). Available at: www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/ComingDownfromtheZenClouds.htm [accessed November 14, 2010], p. 1.

52 See Emmanuel Lévinas, *De l'existence à l'existant* (Paris, 1947), p. 80.

53 John Cottingham, *Descartes* (London, 1998), p. 20.

54 Descartes, AT VII. 22–3.

of the true God, to such an extent that I was inescapable of perfect knowledge about anything else until I became aware of him."[55] As Taylor remarks: "it is sheer anachronism to read back into [Descartes's] mind what later Deists and unbelievers did with his concept of reason."[56] This overtly Christian element is clearly an aspect of Descartes's thought that does not fit well with any form of Buddhist thought, whether critical or topical.[57]

We might say that a true *vāda* must strive to eliminate, as much as possible, the *tarka* elements—"dogmas, unexamined faith claims and untested speculations"[58]—in understanding, while being aware and responsive to the conditionality of all knowledge and understanding, thereby reaching a cognitive stage to which we might apply another Sanskrit term, *adhimukti*.[59] The strong points of the Cartesian paradigm for Critical Buddhism are the questioning of authority as a basis for wisdom, the turn inwards for the locus of human dignity, a move towards the disenchantment of reality—such that matter is devoid of any spiritual essence or expressive dimension (one might say, empty)—and the notion that, through practice and attunement, one can gain control over the passions without eliminating them (as per the Stoics), to the extent that they are addictive and hence damaging to our life and spiritual progress. Yet, the weaknesses of the paradigm are just as clear. First are the dualistic implications, though—as some recent scholars such as Baker and Morris have argued—this is both overblown and frequently misunderstood by critics.[60] Second is the disengagement that is presumed to be part and parcel of Cartesian epistemology, and that, for all its strengths in helping to overcome the lure of dogma and authority, does not adequately reflect the way that we experience the world in our everyday existence. Here as well, it must be said, recent scholars such as Rodis-Lewis have questioned whether this is truly the case.[61] Third, and most damning from a Buddhist perspective, is the assumption that knowledge must have a deep foundation, in this case within a sort of illumination arising from certainty. Here arises a point at which the work of Descartes's critics—especially Vico—may help to provide a better understanding of *critica* as a basis for Critical Buddhism.

In *Wahrheit und Methode* (*Truth and Method*, 1960), Hans-Georg Gadamer sets up his hermeneutical task with regard to the relation between the immediate

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55 Descartes, AT VII. 71.

56 Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 151.

57 See Lévinas, *De l'existence*, p. 80.

58 Richard P. Hayes, *buddha-l* discussion list, April 19, 2004 (buddha-l@listserv.louisville.edu [accessed April 19, 2004]). See also remarks by Dan Lusthaus in the same thread, April 19, 2004.

59 "Believing and understanding the teachings. Having both faith and understanding in the Buddhist teaching. Correct faith, complete understanding" (DDB, s.v. "adhimukti"). See also T 262.9.7c08.

60 Gordon Baker and Katherine Morris, *Descartes' Dualism* (London and New York, 1996).

61 See Rodis-Lewis, *Descartes*.

and natural realm and the intellectual and rational aspect of human being. Though natural to humanity, the latter is, however, distinct from the former. Alienating distanciation is bridged by *Bildung* or what Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) called a "rising up to humanity through culture," i.e., for Gadamer an ability to affirm and appreciate difference on the road to a universalizing viewpoint, free from all grasping and self-interest.[62] We need to be careful not to conflate hermeneutical *Bildung* with scientific objectivity, however—this is not entirely a matter of ridding oneself of all assumptions and prejudices (a task Gadamer believes is, at any rate, impossible). What Gadamer elsewhere terms "*Faktizität*" (factualness) is strongly related to the notion of language as the medium of human historical being—medium here implying not the instrumental sense of tool or instrument but rather the "place" where being "occurs."

> Just as things, those units of our experience of the world that are constituted by their suitability and their significance, are brought into language, so the tradition that has come down to us is again brought to speak in our understanding and interpretation of it. The linguistic nature of this bringing into language is the same as that of the human experience of the world in general.[63]

In his discussion of the "aesthetic" element in hermeneutics, Gadamer distinguishes the modern (i.e., post-Romantic) concept of aesthetic consciousness based on a false division of "pure feeling" from knowledge and truth, whereby art is understood as contributing to the life of feeling but not to human knowledge or truth. Such aesthetic differentiation effectively de-historicizes and de-politicizes art, and belies the fact that: "The pantheon of art is not a timeless present that presents itself to a pure aesthetic consciousness, but the act of a mind and spirit that has collected and gathered itself historically."[64]

In an essay entitled "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," Gadamer's primary intention is to rehabilitate the tainted term "prejudice" (Gr. *Vorurteil*).[65] Following what Gadamer calls our post-Enlightenment bias, judgment is *taking a position* or a stand, while prejudice is *limiting* one's position on the basis of prior, and often misconceived or incoherent notions. In fact, Gadamer understands *Vorurteil* in terms of *Vorverständnis*, which has no pejorative sense and always remains part of understanding in terms of questioning. Thus, prejudices "are simply conditions whereby we experience

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[62] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 10–14.

[63] Ibid., p. 456; see also p. 350; Alan Olson, *Transcendence and Hermeneutics: An Interpretation of the Philosophy of Karl Jaspers* (The Hague, Boston and London, 1979), p. 175.

[64] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 97.

[65] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 270.

something—whereby what we encounter says something to us."[66] Prejudices are conditions for experience and are intimately connected with our capacity for imagination (Gr. *Phantasie*); both involve an opening up to and by that which is "worthy of questioning" (Gr. *fragwürdig*). In short: "If we want to do justice to man's finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices."[67]

In terms of historiography, the hermeneutic task is conceived as an attempt not to unearth the originary meaning of a text, but rather to overcome the gap between the text as past and the reader as present. For Gadamer, it is the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of texts—their "historical effectivity"—that shapes meaning and interpretation. This might be understood as a hermeneutic version of the Buddhist *upāya*—though perhaps less intentional. As Harry Harootunian remarks with regard to Edo-period nativism in Japan:

> The principal criterion of analysis can no longer insist on a symmetrical relationship between discourses and a "reality" that is external to them, because discourse can only be grasped as instances of an interdiscursive construction, as mosaics of utterances crisscrossing one another and establishing their own categories of adequacy … Such a view also rejects the received distinction between a "symbolic" order and the "real" as ontologically given in favour of a view of these claims as effects of historical and social forces.[68]

The critique raised by Jürgen Habermas against Gadamer's claim to the universality of the hermeneutical quest allows for a convergence between critical theory and philosophical hermeneutics. This connection also enlivens the strategies of Critical Buddhism, for as Lin Chen-kuo remarks: "Like Habermas, the Critical Buddhists choose to carry out the project of modernity because they see that both the West and Buddhism share the same idea of enlightenment, namely as a quest for liberation from ignorance and domination."[69] Habermas emphasizes the reflexive nature of philosophical hermeneutics, and, to a point, reiterates Gadamer's justification for its universality. This is more than simply a philosophical strategy: philosophical hermeneutics is and must be self-exploratory, it must take place and develop within the "simultaneously unlimited and restricted nature of intersubjectivity," it "brings to consciousness experiences of our language which we gain in the

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[66] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley, 1976), p. 133.

[67] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 277.

[68] H.D. Harootunian, *Things Seen and Unseen: Discourse and Ideology in Tokugawa Nativism* (Chicago and London, 1988), p. 5.

[69] Lin Chen-kuo, "Metaphysics, Suffering and Liberation: The Debate Between Two Buddhisms," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), p. 305.

course of exercising our communicative competence, that is, by moving within language."[70]

Habermas diverges from the Heideggerian/Gadamerian path and into what he will later call "critical hermeneutics," which might be summed up by the following query. By what criteria are we to judge the truth of pre-judgment or pre-understanding, given that this, too, is always already "distorted" by social, psychological, political, and ideological forces beyond our immediate awareness and control? Habermas outlines two possible paths we might follow in attempting to solve this problem: 1) psychoanalysis and critique of ideology—where the subject is unaware of the hidden intentions guiding and distorting her expressive activity; and 2) a "general theory of natural languages"—which provides "a rational reconstruction of a regulating system that adequately defines general linguistic competence."[71] Let us examine the first possibility. Both psychoanalysis and the critique of ideology provide us with examples of the prominence of cases of "systematically distorted communication"—where "incomprehensibility is … the result of a defective organization of speech itself."[72] Moreover, as Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) has shown, such distortions are not by any means confined to madmen and the pathological, but both inhabit and inhibit the lives and speech of so-called normal folks. From an extended analysis of the basic insights of psychoanalysis, Habermas concludes that: "The implicit knowledge of the conditions of systematically distorted communication is sufficient for the questioning of the ontological self-understanding of the philosophical hermeneutic."[73]

For Habermas, the problem with Gadamer's formulation of the universality of hermeneutics lies in his confidence in the reliability of the so-called "preceding consensus." In fact, a consensus achieved by seemingly reasonable means may be the result of pseudo-communication. This, Habermas explains, is not at all a new insight; it was well known by Enlightenment thinkers. In the wake of Freud and the Frankfurt School, Enlightenment suspicion of pre-understood consensus arises as a necessity. What is required, Habermas concludes, is a "critically enlightened hermeneutics" that is aware of the difference between "insight" and "delusion" and seeks to distinguish between them through psychoanalysis and critical theory in order to avoid the danger of "the ontologization of language and … the hypostatization of the content of a tradition."[74]

A truly critical Buddhist hermeneutics must take seriously Habermas's addenda to the Gadamerian understanding of philosophical hermeneutics. It must also reflect Gadamer's important distinction between two types of human experience: *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. The former is experience as it is more commonly used

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70 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 182.

71 Ibid., p. 190.

72 Ibid., p. 191.

73 Ibid., p. 203.

74 Ibid., p. 205.

to imply an instantaneous moment, something that one *has*, and thus is connected with a strong sense of the self as subject. *Erfahrung*, on the other hand, is an ongoing process of the continual expansion of one's horizons; it is something one *undergoes*, and as such is somewhat distanced from subjectivity, which is drawn into the event (Gr. *Geschehen*) of meaning: the subject becomes part of the process, not a privileged locus or executor of meaning. Gadamer's vision of hermeneutics helps us to read and interpret the Critical Buddhist critique of topicalism *vis-à-vis* criticalism. Next we must turn to the work of Vico, who plays such a central (and exclusively negative) part in the Critical Buddhism analysis of *topica*.[75]

Giambattista Vico is best known for his monumental work, *Scienza Nuova* (New Science, 1725), in which he covers a breadth of philosophical issues, some of which would not be further developed until centuries after his death in 1744. This breadth of vision, coupled with a certain vagueness in style, has allowed Vico to be championed as father to countless modern philosophical movements, including structuralism, psychoanalysis, existentialism, pragmatism, and historicism. He has also been embraced by both positivists and anti-positivists.[76] As Matsumoto and Hakamaya note—and lament—Vico has enjoyed a renaissance of sorts in the past few decades, partly as a result of the very thing which, according to Bizzel and Herzberg, contributed to his lack of fame in the centuries following his death: an anti-Cartesianism first developed in the short work, *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione* (On the Method of Studies of Our Time, 1700).[77]

Vico's main criticism of Descartes and the Cartesian philosophical system is its attempt to mimic mathematics and the so-called hard sciences. He emphasizes the ways in which Cartesian rationalism, and the critical method in particular, debilitates human thinking by obscuring the significance of imagery and fantasy, as well as undermining the element of uncertainty as an inevitable and necessary element in knowledge construction.[78] Vico posited his own alternative, "topical philosophy," based on the Latin term *topica* (place, field, locus; from Gk. *topos*). *Topos*, a concept which has roots in both Plato and Aristotle as well as the Latin rhetorical and humanist tradition that came after them, connotes a sense of intuition and holism, and leads to: "a different sort of knowledge altogether, a knowledge that includes multiple approaches to concrete problems, a plurality of probable truths, the art of discovery, and the like."[79]

Hakamaya suggests that Vico misreads Descartes in developing his topicalist critique, as if Descartes wanted the seeker to "remain satisfied with the appearance

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75 See Hakamaya, "Critical Philosophy," p. 57.

76 See Peter Burke, *Vico* (New York, 1985).

77 See Patricia Bizzel and Bruce Herzberg (eds), *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* (Boston, 1990).

78 See Ernesto Grassi, "Critical Philosophy or Topical Philosophy? Meditations on the *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione*," in G. Tagliacozzo and H.V. White (eds), *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium* (Baltimore, 1969).

79 Nakamura Yūjirō, quoted in Hakamaya, "Critical Philosophy," p. 61.

of truth (*la vraisemblance*) rather than seeking after the truth itself (*la vérité*)."[80] Vico, says Hakamaya, opposes the "odd or arrogant behaviour" of Cartesian criticalism with the "common sense" of the imagination and the "topical" approach to problems. "[G]ranting *topica* superiority simply on the basis of precedence," Hakamaya counters, "leaves little recourse other than the realist affirmation of the topical as the self-evident original ground … [and thus] the essential point can be only to 'discover' the truly existent *topos*."[81]

However, an alternative reading of Vico connects him in important ways with the work of his foe Descartes. Robert Hoopes, in a work entitled *Right Reason in the Renaissance* (1962), writes of the transformation of the notion of reason in Europe during the seventeenth century: "The intellectual history of the seventeenth century is marked by the gradual dissociation of knowledge and virtue as accepted and indivisible elements in the ideal structure of human reason, a shift from the tradition of right reason to the new tradition of scientific reasoning."[82] This previous form of *right reason*, a product of Enlightenment humanism but with deeper roots in Greek and Christian modes of thinking, posited reason as being very much "a way of doing and a condition of being."[83] Right reason may be thought of as:

> a faculty which fuses in dynamic interactivity the function of knowing and being, which stands finally as something more than a proximate means of rational discovery or "a nonmoral" instrument of inquiry, and which affirms that what a man knows depends on what, as a moral being, he chooses to make himself.[84]

Consider, in this light, the following remark of Descartes in a letter written in 1645:

> The function of reason in the conduct of life is to examine and consider without passion the value of the perfections, both of the body and the soul, which can be acquired by our conduct, so that since we are commonly obliged to deprive ourselves of some goods in order to acquire others, we shall always choose the better.[85]

Here we get a sense of the practical or pragmatic element of reason, as well as the connection between knowledge and ethics or "good conduct." Rather than

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80 Hakamaya, "Critical Philosophy," p. 64.

81 Ibid.

82 Robert Hoopes, *Right Reason in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 161.

83 Donald Wiebe, "Modernism," in Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (eds), *Guide to the Study of Religion* (London and New York, 2000), p. 358.

84 Hoopes, *Right Reason*, p. 161.

85 Descartes, quoted in Cottingham, *Descartes*, p. 56.

beginning out of a prior illumination of certainty, knowledge and wisdom appears to be a sort of finding one's way (Fr. *se débrouiller*), and a virtue to be practiced and perfected over time.[86] This vision emerges more strongly in the work and legacy of Vico, which provided seeds for the later understandings of Herder and the Romantic expressivists—a view in which "truth is a matter not only of the intellect but of virtue, and [thus reason] involves not only the discovery of truth but the doing of good."[87] Yet, at least according to the standard view, such an understanding of reason was eventually trumped by the objectivist view proffered in different ways by Vico's forebears Francis Bacon (1561–1626), Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), and Descartes.

The anti-Cartesian work of Vico—particularly *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione*—plays an important role in the construction of Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*:

> Like his outline of a "new science" … Vico's pedagogical manifesto is based on old truths. He appeals to the *sensus communis*, common sense, and to the humanistic ideal of *eloquentia*—elements already present in the classical concept of wisdom. "Talking well" (*eu legein*) has always had two meanings; it is not merely a rhetorical ideal. It also means saying the right things—i.e., the truth—and is not just the art of speaking—of saying something well.[88]

That is to say, like Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) after him, Vico sensed that the world of human existence is in some fundamental sense *linguistic*. The truths of a linguistic-cultural community are shaped, though not necessarily determined, by its own particular language and culture. In several important aspects, this reconceptualization brings Vico into contact with the Critical Buddhist emphasis of the importance of language/speech in *dharma-pravicaya* or discriminating wisdom, central to the practice of *critica*.

"As God's truth is what God comes to know when he creates and assembles it, so human truth is what man comes to know as he builds it, shaping it by his actions."[89] According to Isaiah Berlin (1909–1997), in writing the above lines Vico proved himself well ahead of his time: "This was a revolutionary idea, as was his subsequent proposition that there really wasn't any objective way to stand outside of all cultures and say that one society's art and poetry was better than another's." Thus Vico might rightly be called—as he is by Berlin—"the true father of both

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86 Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, *Place and Dream: Japan and the Virtual* (Amsterdam, 2004), p. 73.

87 Wiebe, "Modernism," p. 358; for a discussion of Herder and the Romantic expressivists see Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 368–92.

88 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 19.

89 Vico, quoted in Isaiah Berlin, "The Idea of Pluralism," in Walter Truett Anderson (ed.), *The Truth About the Truth* (New York, 1995), p. 49.

the modern concept of culture and of what we might call cultural pluralism."[90] Of course, one might then reasonably go on to charge Vico with unleashing a potentially pernicious moral relativism on the Western (and eventually Asian) world, of the sort decried by Critical Buddhists and many others. Yet Berlin goes to some length in distinguishing relativism from the more aptly-termed "pluralism" that can be attributed to Vico and his legacy:

> Members of one culture, by the force of imaginative insight, understand (what Vico calls *entrare*) the values, the ideals, the forms of life of another culture or society, even those remote in time or space. They may find these values unacceptable, but if they open their minds sufficiently they can grasp how one might be a full human being, with whom one can communicate, and at the same time live in the light of values different from one's own, but which nevertheless one can see as values, ends of life, by the realization of which men could be fulfilled.[91]

True pluralism involves the view that there are many different ends that men and women may seek and still be fully human, able to engage thoughtfully and critically with others. John Cobb comments further on the type of pluralism implicit in the work or Vico and his heirs:

> I have often understood relativism to be the affirmation that every event, every assertion, every belief is conditioned by a multitude of factors: physical, social, historical, psychological, biographical, and so forth. This is almost self-evidently true. I have understood relativism to mean further that I need to recognize and acknowledge that my own assertions and beliefs … are conditioned, and I take this to be no more than the correct existential implication of the general statement.[92]

Though Cobb is a philosopher of religion working out of the Western Christian tradition, this stands a plausible reading of the fundamental Buddhist understanding of the relation between reality, understanding and action. Moreover, Cobb waxes Nietzschean about the implications of this stance: "I do not reluctantly acknowledge relativity of this sort. I affirm it as one of my deepest convictions … It can free us *from* the quest for certainty and *for* a far less inhibited and more imaginative search for insight and understanding."[93]

Accusing Vico of rhetorical overstatement is certainly plausible, at least to the extent in which the topical can be viewed as a breaking up of the sectoral

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90 Berlin, "The Idea of Pluralism," p. 47.

91 Ibid., pp. 51–2.

92 John Cobb, "Responses to Relativism: Common Ground, Deconstruction and Reconstruction," *Soundings*, 73/4 (1990): p. 595.

93 Ibid., p. 596.

and the reach of something really comprehensible that has the ambition of providing a route map of culture at any given time.[94] However, the conclusion reached by Hakamaya does not necessarily follow. Transcendental realism is not the only alternative here. By reading Vico through what amounts to a realist and essentialist lens, Hakamaya misses the critical-constructive point that is the key to Vico's work on the critical and the topical. For Vico, *critica* and *topica* are not mutually exclusive; rather they can be seen to complement one another. Vico is concerned with the arrogance and hypocrisy of the type of criticism that will not accept that common sense takes its inspiration not from the "true" but rather from the "probable."[95] Moreover, perhaps the biggest flaw in the work of Descartes is the element of radical disengagement that appears to accompany the faculty of reason. This runs against the principle of mediation—which in a Buddhist context emerges from the doctrine of *pratītya-samutpāda*—and supports in its stead a de-historicized and falsely universalized epistemology.

As Gadamer argues, Vico: "does not deny the merits of modern critical science but rather aims to show its limits. Even within this new science and its mathematical methodology, one still cannot do without the wisdom of the ancients and their cultivation of *prudentia* and *eloquentia*."[96] Gadamer notes that the key to Vico's reformed methodology is in fact what he calls the *sensus communis*—and that we should not translate this as the banal "common sense" but rather as the "sense that founds community."[97] Since all knowledge, and all experience and interpretation, is thoroughly embedded in or conditioned by language and culture, the notion of a pre-conditioned experience as the ground of knowledge (and being) can no longer stand. Indeed, "instead of holding that we must initially know something in order to think (with it and about it) … it is impossible to know anything except by thinking."[98] Within Chinese Buddhist tradition, Huineng's understanding of *wuxin* (Jp. *mushin*, "no mind") suggests, in similar fashion, that concepts are the very nature of mind, and only become obstacles when one becomes attached to them, that is, when one loses the sense of their impermanence as heuristic tools.

In short, Vico's concern with language and history, which led, via Herder, to the development of Romantic aesthetics and epistemology, created a tradition at least as "modern" as that of Descartes, a form of *counter*-rationalism—not, as

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94 See Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity* (Minneapolis, 1991), pp. 120–25; Marion, *Sur l'ontologie*, pp. 171–7; also Karl-Otto Apel, *Die Idee der Sprache in der Tradition des Humanismus von Dante bis Vico* (Bonn, 1963); Ernesto Grassi, *Heidegger and the Question of Renaissance Humanism: Four Studies* (Binghampton, 1983).

95 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 20.

96 Ibid.

97 See Gadamer, *Kleine Schiften*, IV. 22, quoted in Maurice Boutin, "Réponses / Responses to John C. Robertson / 1," *Studies in Religion*, 8/4 (Fall 1979): p. 382.

98 See Van Meter Ames, *Zen and American Thought* (London, 1978), p. 170, with reference to Charles Sanders Peirce's criticism of Descartes.

Hakamaya asserts, an *anti*-rationalism.[99] In this light, *pace* Hakamaya, Vico's topicalism may play a constructive role in the issue of Buddhist ethics and religious criticism, a role beyond that of mere foil for Cartesian *critica*. Both the Latin humanists and the Critical Buddhists, like Vico, recognized the power of language to shape thought and history itself. However, Hakamaya's distinction between language and facts does not do justice to Vico's dictum: *verbum et factum conventuntur*. As Grassi points out:

> Humanistic thought was constantly concerned with the unity of *res* and *verba*, content and form, which once disjoined could never be reunited. If the rational element be admitted as the sole possible content of our speech, it will no longer be possible to give it a "form" capable of moving souls.[100]

These words apply not only to poetry and religious invocation, but also to engaged, critical philosophy. Vico's alternative vision of the place of language provides a useful criticism to the Cartesian tradition. Though Vico provides a ready foil for Hakamaya's Cartesian *critica*, Hakamaya grossly simplifies Vico's thought, turning him into the mentor of "reactionary irrationalism" and periodic revolts against critical philosophy.[101] Yet from Vico sprang a significant counter-tradition which, in recognizing the limits of criticism, the limits of reason, and the limits of designative language not only in purely philosophical but also and particularly in ethical-political terms, can add much to the attempt to forge a truly critical Buddhism. As Jamie Hubbard notes: "there is much about [Vico's] position that resonates well with Critical Buddhism, just as there is much about Descartes's criticism that seems rather odd in the Buddhist context."[102]

As we have seen, a major critique of Kyoto School philosophy in general, and Nishida's pure experience and logic of place in particular, is the tendency towards a dehistoricized noetic ground for awareness and subjectivity that "makes it impossible in the end to consider the 'contradictions' of this world as tragic contradictions; it slants one in the direction of esthetic contemplation."[103] In speaking of Nishida's later move towards understanding *basho* in light of absolute nothingness, Jan van Bragt argues that it "seems to wipe away every imperfection of actual human life by proclaiming a higher standard from which all such things

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[99] Though, as Ernesto Grassi states in the conclusion to his article on Vico: "the true history of the humanistic tradition in its anti-Cartesian role has yet to be written" (Grassi, "Critical Philosophy," pp. 38–9).

[100] Grassi, "Critical Philosophy," p. 50; see Hakamaya, "Critical Philosophy," p. 65.

[101] Hakamaya, "Critical Philosophy," p. 57.

[102] Jamie Hubbard, "Topophobia," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 83.

[103] Kitamori Kazuo, quoted in Jan Van Bragt, "Kyoto Philosophy—Intrinsically Nationalistic?" in James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo (eds), *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu, 1994), p. 252.

are seen to be non-existent or illusory."[104] In similar manner, David Little has accused Nishitani's concept of the "*śūnyāta*-field" in *Religion and Nothingness* of failing to "step down far enough from the lofty heights of emptiness to reach the human condition in its concrete actuality."[105] What is missing here, in particular, is a sense of the mediating activity of history and culture, and the effects and implications of such in terms of human action, including most crucially the sphere of ethics and social justice. More specifically, both Van Bragt and Little worry about the place of the "other" in Kyoto School thought. Nishida and Nishitani appear to see the very idea of an I-Thou split as being another manifestation of the subject-object dualism common to Western thought traditions since Descartes. Against this notion, Van Bragt cites Lévinas to the effect that: "the relation with the Other does not have the same status as the relations given to objectifying thought, where the distinction of terms also reflects their union."[106]

Let us consider this matter further by returning to Nishida's later writings, where the author consciously turns away from the psychologism of *An Inquiry into the Good*, and towards a logic of place that he begins to consider as actualized in the historical realm. Although, as noted above, we have reasons to doubt the success with which Nishida was able to actually render this notion fully meaningful, it does allow for an opening—a possible extension or strong misreading—of his later thought towards a truly historical and hermeneutical *topos*. Whereas Nishida goes on to conflate a historical epoch with the present moment—a turn which feeds directly into his more nationalistic sentiments regarding the *kokutai* as the self-determination of the absolute present—we might better reverse the equation, so that the de-historicized present dissolves under the pressure of historical contingency. Such a suggestion is supported by some remarks of Tanabe, Nishida's earliest and still one of his strongest critics. In contrast to Nishida and Nishitani, Tanabe found the fundamental ground of existence in the world in something he called "thetic judgment"—which he presents as a *media res* between the immediate intuitionism of pure experience and the subject-object dualism of most post-Cartesian epistemology. Thetic judgment, Tanabe explains, emerges out of the "idyll of pure experience" by way of action: "One begins to act, first by paying attention, and then by making images of reality."[107]

We may also find support for an alternative sense of *topos* by looking more closely at the term itself. Although it is often directly translated from the Greek into English as "place," the term actually has a much richer meaning. One of its connotations, picked up by Vico and extended by Gadamer, is "common ground" or

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[104] Van Bragt, "Kyoto Philosophy," p. 253.

[105] David Little, "The Problem of Ethics in Nishitani's *Religion and Nothingness*," in Unno Taitetsu (ed.), *The Religious Philosophy of Nishitani Keiji* (Fermont, 1990), p. 23.

[106] Van Bragt, "Kyoto Philosophy," p. 254.

[107] Robert Adams, "The Feasibility of the Philosophical in Early Taishō Japan: Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, n.d.), pp. 182–3.

"place of meeting," and it also contains overtones of "rhetorical theme, community, and common sense."[108] Some translators of Nishida's *basho* have preferred to use the less familiar but also less substantive term "locus," which implies both: a) the set of all point or lines that satisfy or are determined by specific conditions; and b) the scene of any event or action (especially the place of a meeting). Others have opted to translate the term as "horizon"—i.e., "the range of interest or activity that can be anticipated"—which hearkens to Gadamer; or even "matrix"—i.e., "an enclosure within which something originates or develops (from the Latin for womb)," which reintroduces a number of important Buddhist tropes such as *tathāgata-garbha* (Jp. *nyoraizō*).[109] Several writers have also noted the similarity between *basho*/*topos* as used by Nishida and another Greek philosophical term, *chōra*.[110] Ōhashi Ryōsuke argues that, as employed by Nishida, *basho* stands diametrically opposed to the Aristotelian substance (*ousia*).[111]

The term *chōra* has received favorable treatment in the lexicon of several prominent modern Western thinkers. Heidegger writes of *chōra* (Gr. *Ort*) not as a point in space but rather as a place of convergence, while Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) suggests:

> The ordinary sense of *chōra*, meaning land or country … presents a coherent picture of how the many things may be organized by nature or by law, into a unity that does not abolish the individual differences of the thing it embraces. Given some common measure, the composite deserves a name that shows the bond joining its component parts.

For Derrida, *chōra*, rather than being a spatial term in itself, refers to a "gathered plurality" that "instantiates what spatiality effects."[112] A similar notion of place appears in the work of Lévinas. In *De l'existence à l'existant*, he notes:

> Place, then, before being a geometric space, and before being the concrete setting of the Heidegerrian world, is a base. This is what makes the body the very advent of consciousness. It is no wise a thing … because its being belongs to the order

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108 Lin, "Metaphysics, Suffering and Liberation," p. 39.

109 Dilworth employs "horizon" in his translation of Nishida's *Art and Morality*, and both "matrix" and "place" in his translation of Nishida's *Last Writings*; he speaks of the logic of *basho* as a "matrix ontology" in David A. Dilworth, "Introduction," in Nishida Kitarō, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview* (Honolulu, 1987), pp. 14–20. See also Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, p. 299.

110 See Botz-Bornstein, *Place and Dream*, p. 74; Augustin Berque, "Basho, chōra, Tjujurrpa, ou le problème du monde," paper presented at the colloquim "Logique du lieu et dépassement de la modernité" (EHESS of Paris, December 1997).

111 Ōhashi Ryōsuke, "La théorie des groupes et la notion du monde chez Nishida," in Augustin Berque and Philippe Nys (eds), *Logique du lieu et oeuvre humain* (Brussels, 1997), p. 39.

112 Gregory Ulmer, *Heuretics: The Logic of Invention* (Baltimore, 1984), p. 74.

> of events and not to that of substantives. It is not posited; it is a position. It is not situated in a space given beforehand; it is the irruption in anonymous being of localization itself.[113]

Elsewhere, Lévinas argues: "The I is not a substance endowed with thought; it is a substance because it is endowed with thought."[114] The priority of the event of thinking or consciousness over the substantial self is a plausible reading of the Cartesian *cogito*, and even fits to some degree with Nishida's insistence on the logical priority of *basho* from which both subject and object emerge. "[B]ehind the *cogito*, or rather in the fact that the *cogito* leads back to 'a thinking thing', we discern a situation which precedes the scission of being into an 'inside' and an 'outside'. Transcendence is not the fundamental movement of the ontological adventure; it is founded in the non-transcendence of position."[115]

113 Lévinas, *De l'existence*, p. 71.
114 Ibid., p. 87.
115 Ibid., p. 100.

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Chapter 5

Radical Contingency and Compassion

> Whether or not things truly exist and whether or not there are external objects may be points of contention, but for Buddhists (much as thought for Descartes) language is, in a sense, a given, a basis that is beyond doubt. No one can deny that we name things, that we use language, and that such usage can lead to effective action. Hence it is natural and sensible to begin the analysis with words, with what is truly primitive.
>
> José Ignacion Cabezón, "Language and Ontology,"
> in *Buddhism and Language*, p. 163

> The relation between our truth claims and the rest of the world is causal rather than representational. It causes us to hold beliefs, and we continue to hold the beliefs which prove to be reliable guides to getting what we want.
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> Richard Rorty, "Truth without Correspondence to Reality,"
> in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 33

As Martin Jaffee, reflecting on the work of Gadamer, has put it: "Human acts of understanding bear an ontological weight sustainable only by those which come to know themselves in the midst of a meaning-laden (i.e., linguistic) universe." As such, religion is "nothing less than an awakening to language."[1] In the context of modern Japanese thought, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi wrote of his own "great concern" as being "neither the objective pursuit of reality nor even the objective realization of [my] own way of being, but ontological self-transformation through practice."[2] Here we see a move away from the desire for self-knowledge towards self-expression, fed through action and experience as much as through introspection (Jp. *hansei*). From a Critical Buddhist perspective, this might be considered a move towards a "postmetaphysical Buddhism," based on a pragmatist or neo-pragmatist way of thinking about language and the world, in which it is the twin tropes of contingency and compassion that form the foundations for Buddhist subjectivity. According to Santiago Zabala:

> The ultimate goal of philosophical investigation after the end of metaphysics is no longer contact with something existing independently from us, but rather *Bildung*, the unending formation of oneself. This renovation of philosophy

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1 Martin S. Jaffee, "Fessing Up in Theory: On Professing and Confessing in the Religious Studies Classroom," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 9/4 (1997): p. 330.

2 Quoted in Abe Masao, "Hisamatsu's Philosophy of Awakening," translated by Christopher A. Ives, *The Eastern Buddhist, New Series*, 14/1 (1981): p. 31.

> through the surpassing of metaphysics has a linguistic outcome in the idea that the linguistic a priori is the form in which our experience is structured. If this experience is essentially linguistic and our existence essentially historic, then there is no way to overcome language and to accede to the "whole" as reality.[3]

In order to give greater specificity to this vision, we need to look more closely at the more specific relation between language, *topica* and *critica*.

The entire history of Western philosophy is sometimes said to be an elaborate response or "footnote" to questions and themes developed in the work of Plato. Whether or not such a claim is overstated, it is undisputable that one significant legacy of Plato's thought can be found Platon*ism*—"a set of metaphysical distinctions (appearance–reality, matter–mind, made–found, sensible–intellectual, etc.)" This "broad nest of dualisms" has colored the Western philosophical tradition from Plato to Descartes, Kant, and Hegel, only breaking down with the work of Nietzsche and his twentieth century heirs. Platonism also provides an ontological framework for the dominant Western religion, Christianity. It is also fair to say that Platonistic distinctions and are not confined to the rarefied games played by philosophers and theologians, but have seeped into and provided foundations for what is often called "common sense"—i.e., the way non-philosophical folk in Western cultures understand themselves and approach the world.

It has become commonplace in contemporary Western criticism to point out the various problems associated with the legacy of Platonistic essentialism and dualism. Perhaps the strongest of such critiques has come from the recently late American philosopher Richard Rorty, as part of a lifelong argument that, I shall argue, has great relevance to contemporary critical and constructive Buddhist studies.[4] Despite various tendencies towards essentialism and dualism in classical Indian thought, Buddhism since its inception has always had, by virtue of the key doctrines of dependent arising, interdependence, impermanence, no-self, and emptiness, a wealth of tools with which to combat such. As a result, early Buddhist ontology and epistemology avoids many of the metaphysical conundrums that dogged the Greeks and Christian scholastics of the West. Yet, having said that, Buddhist thinkers were not always able to "heal themselves" of some of the more subtle versions of essentialist thinking—versions based less in Platonic Realism than in the temptations akin to Kant's *Ding an Sich* or Hegel's Absolute Mind or

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[3] Santiago Zabala, "A Religion without Theists or Atheists," in Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo, *The Future of Religion* (New York, 2005), p. 52.

[4] Rorty's debt to John Dewey should be noted. Dewey once said of religion that its future: "is connected with the possibility of developing a faith in the possibilities of human experience and human relationships that will create a vital sense of the solidarity of human interests and inspire action to make that sense a reality" (*What I Believe*, 1930; quoted in Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo, *The Future of Religion* [New York, 2005], p. 1). Dewey's description correlates well with the understanding of Critical Buddhism being developed here.

Spirit. I argue that, while Buddhism has never had to worry about Platonism in its pure form, it has, on occasion, lapsed into variations of mentalism or idealism—which not only cause unnecessary philosophical confusion, but ultimately prohibit the "soteriological" and ethical goals of Buddhist praxis. Another way to put this is to suggest that Buddhist thought needs to undergo—in a more thoroughgoing fashion—the Linguistic Turn.

Much of the present concern with language to be found in contemporary scholarship in the humanities and social sciences comes from the so-called "linguistic turn" of the early to mid-twentieth century. A recognition of the significance of language for knowledge and existence itself first emerged out of the work of Western philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), and Martin Heidegger, and found full flower in postwar developments such as Gadamer's hermeneutics, Derrida's deconstruction, and Richard Rorty's neo-pragmatism. As one contemporary scholar has put it, "The turn towards language, the most recognizable turn of [the twentieth] century, emerges clearly enough in repudiation of both empty formalist reason and of utterly inward experience."[5] Nietzsche made an early move towards language when he defined truth as "a mobile army of metaphors," and Wittgenstein took this further with his basic idea of philosophy as a kind of linguistic therapy designed to search and correct the muddles created (largely by philosophers themselves) in the search for "truth." A.J. Ayer has summarized this well:

> For Wittgenstein … the idea that there could be a stock of philosophical truths was dangerously naïve. He thought that people made difficulties for themselves by failing to understand how their language worked. This led them to raise problems to which they could see no issue, to construct dilemmas which they could not resolve. In their efforts to escape from these perplexities they relapsed into talking nonsense. The remedy was to trace the muddle to its source by exposing the linguistic misconception from which it arose: and this was the role assigned to the enlightened philosopher. Thus, the success of a philosophical inquiry would consist, not in the acquisition of a fresh piece of knowledge, but rather in the disappearance of the problem on which it was directed.[6]

Wittgenstein helps us to clarify a dilemma regarding the post-Kantian anxiety over whether our concepts (now considered as linguistic rather than mental entities) can ever really fit the world "as it is." This is the origin of the (continuing) realist-antirealist debate in philosophy. It is important for us to understand what is at stake in the seeming priority given to language within this movement. As a number of thinkers (along with countless ordinary people) have noted, at one level language seems "ill-suited to express what we feel"—and this seems especially true when

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5 Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Princeton, 1992), p. 57.

6 A.J. Ayer, *The Concept of a Person* (London, 1963), p. 7.

it comes to religious "feelings."[7] With respect to the Romantic-phenomenological approaches that dominated much twentieth century Western scholarship in religion, we might note here Wilhelm Dilthey's insistence on: "a gap between our inner and outer modes of existence"; and his correspondent emphasis on "the dimensions of inner life which cannot find expression in language." In short: "While expression may be natural, it is partial and wanting in comparison to the ineffable fullness of lived experience."[8] Of course, Dilthey was hardly inventing anything new—his approach follows the Kantian "gap" between noumenon and phenomenon, itself a restatement of the Cartesian "mind-body" problem. As Richard Rorty and others now argue, this whole line of thinking is based on what might be called a philosophical mistake—and one that has parallels within Buddhist approaches to language, both in Indo-Tibetan scholastic and Chan/Zen traditions. Yet, according to Gadamer:

> The fact that our desire and capacity to understand always go beyond any statement that we can make seems like a critique of language. But this does not alter the fundamental priority of language … [for] the critical superiority which we claim over language pertains not to the conventions of verbal expression but to *the conventions of meaning that have become sedimented in language*. Thus that understanding says nothing against the essential connection between understanding and language. In fact it confirms this connection.[9]

Wittgenstein suggested that the question of whether language "fits the world" is based on a dubious premise (or, perhaps, a dubious metaphor): that of a solitary (Cartesian) knower who views a "reality" that is draped by a "veil of language"—a veil which, depending on one's commitment to realism, is either transparent, opaque, or solid. In response, Wittgenstein conceived of language as *internally related* to the world, which is to say that neither language nor world is conceivable by human beings prior to, or independently of, the other, as well as that language-users are not *spectators* of the world but rather *performers* within it. The last point is especially germane to the development of Critical Buddhism. Language-users are inevitably, and should always conceive of themselves as, actors in the world. One of the main stumbling-blocks, however, to such a conception of the active role of language and knowledge is the representational model which has such a deep place in Western, and, by extension, modern thought. Rorty argues that many thinkers, even today, view the linguistic turn with some skepticism, for the main reason that it seems to lead to the view that there can be no knowledge,

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7 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 401.

8 Hans Penner, "Interpretation," in Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (eds), *Guide to the Study of Religion* (London and New York, 2000), p. 60; see also Michael Ermarth, *Wilhelm Dilthey: The Critique of Historical Reason* (Chicago, 1978), p. 281.

9 Gadamer, *Relevance of the Beautiful*, p. 401.

truth or meaning—in short, that it opens the floodgates to epistemological (and perhaps even moral) relativism. But this is simply because these critics continue to accept a representational paradigm, which is itself built upon ocular metaphors that have been driven into Western thought since Plato.[10] To say that language maintains an internal relation to the world does not mean that language somehow creates things (in themselves), but rather that language plays a pivotal role in the construction and elaboration of *meaning*—which is an epistemological rather than ontological claim.[11]

To put it another way, this is to accept language as in a Darwinian sense *instrumental*—a "tool" that is used by humans to fulfill certain desires and needs—but also to allow that the end towards which language reaches is often either a transformation of behavior or a restructuring of identity, ends which themselves must be articulated linguistically. It is at once to demystify language as being "magical" in the sense of allowing us to connect with a transcendent or nonhuman power, but also to confound the opposite (and perhaps more common) notion that language is a "veil" that forever limits us from access to Higher Truth, Absolute Knowledge, or Things in Themselves. In short, it is to understand human language as being both naturalistic and instrumental.[12]

Here, again, the work of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics proves useful. For Gadamer, language provides the *Mitte*—medium, middle ground, or locus—where understanding quite literally "takes place."[13] In short, language is the *Vermittlung*, the communicative medium that establishes a pre-dialogical common ground. Essentially, this *topos* (or *basho*) of linguistic agreement amounts to a shared commitment to the subject at hand; it is, in some respects, faith or hope in dialogical engagement *leading* somewhere. It is not, it must be stressed, an agreement on any kind of answer or truth itself (though it may, of course, become this). As with participants in a game or sport, *a priori* commitment to an engagement, based on certain fundamental rules (of communicability) is necessary, but does not exhaust the meaning of the dialogical encounter itself, which must remain open-ended.

Paul Ricoeur agrees that critical hermeneutics seeks its first locality in language. However, in order to understand the hermeneutical relation to language, he also insists we reflect upon the implications of *polysemy*: "the feature by which our words have more than one meaning when considered outside of their use in a determinate context."[14] Polysemy calls forth the role of context in determining the

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[10] See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, 1979).

[11] See Donald Davidson, *Inquiries Into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford, 2001), p. 198.

[12] See Richard Rorty, "Truth without Correspondence to Reality," in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 64.

[13] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York, 1988), 3.3B.

[14] Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 44.

meaning of specific utterances; context involves an "activity of discernment" by which the interlocutors engage in an interplay of question and answer—similar, perhaps, to the Zen tradition of *mondō*. Ricoeur refers to this process (which differs little from Gadamer's *Erfahrung*) as interpretation in its most elementary form, and argues that this dialogical interplay cannot exist (at least in the same fashion) when a reader is faced with a text rather than a person. Thus, the hermeneutical encounter with writing requires "specific techniques" in order to "raise the chain of written signs to discourse and to discern the message through the superimposed codifications peculiar to the realisation of discourse as a text."[15] Unlike meeting, textual interpretation involves a *reproduction* or *representation* of meaning. This relates back to Gadamer's investigation of the sort of alienating distanciation (Gr. *Verfremdung*) that is not only the ontological presupposition of the human sciences, but also the very precondition for objectivity. Alienation, Gadamer concludes, destroys the primordial relation of belonging (Gr. *Zugehörigkeit*),[16] without which there can be no real relation to the historical. Ricoeur argues that, in order to retain the balance between the Romantic and critical, the ontological and epistemological aspects of hermeneutics, we must ask, with, or perhaps against, Gadamer: "how is it possible to introduce a critical instance into a consciousness of belonging which is expressly defined by the rejection of distanciation?"[17] The answer is that such is only possible "insofar as historical consciousness seeks not simply to repudiate distanciation but to assume it."[18]

Returning once again to the fertile term *topos*, we can find within its multivalence the sense of: "a relation between linguistic terms (usually words), which is acceptable for making an inference" about the relation between these terms. *Topos* appears to be one of the most useful techniques that help raise linguistic relations into reality, mainly by establishing fruitful connections and relations (here the word comes remarkably close to a sister term, *tropos*, which indicates the manner or way in which metaphors or symbols coalesce into meaning).

Roman Catholic philosopher Gianni Vattimo has emphasized the congruence of philosophical hermeneutics with Christian soteriology, in that both are grounded in the attempt to "dissolve" the experience of so-called "objective reality" into "listening to and interpreting messages."[19] This may be an unorthodox interpretation of the Christian *Logos*, but points to the possibility that Christian practice need not stand or fall with Platonist ontology and the gnostic desire for "perfect knowledge," if it is willing and able to dive head first into language and

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15 Ibid., p. 45.

16 This word also implies "affiliation" and, literally, "hearing together."

17 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, p. 61.

18 Ibid.

19 Gianni Vattimo, "The Age of Interpretation," in Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo, *The Future of Religion* (New York, 2005).

interpretation—i.e., hermeneutics—as a kind of "saving grace."[20] Vattimo thus argues for a different sense of "word magic,"[21] in which the "magical" element lies in the capacity of messages—i.e., as framed in sacred texts, whether scripture or *sutra*—to condition, construct, and decenter the way we conceive of and talk about ourselves and the world around us. Can Buddhism make the same leap?

At this point—with this hermeneutical *felix culpa*—we arrive at the heart of what Ricoeur calls "the matter of the text." We tend to think of understanding or interpretation as a *closing* of distance—a merging of inquiring subject and object of inquiry (even when, as Ricoeur points out, this process of appropriation always involves self-interpretation).[22] Yet, as Habermas, Wright, and the Critical Buddhists have noted, and as we have seen above in the discussion of "pure experience," this urge to merge can betray a lack of critical awareness. Ricoeur extends this, suggesting that we in fact *require* distanciation or disruption in order to properly know something. Upon close inspection, this "alienating distanciation," begins to seem less like Weberian "objectivity" and more like Rorty's "irony"—especially when we discover that the term *Verfremdung* implies "using familiar forms in an unfamiliar way."[23] Against Rorty's formulation, Martin Jaffee insists that though:

> … it may be possible to theorize from within irony and even to theologize about irony … it is less possible to bring ironic distance—the simple-minded sense of "objectivity"—into the center of one's existence. Whatever one *thinks*, one still wants to *live* in a world that is rooted in the real, even if that reality is as thoroughly disenchanted as any Weberian model of modernity might imply.[24]

Here, however, Jaffee mistakes the meaning of ironism—at least as developed by Rorty. For irony does not involve an idealist disbelief in reality, but rather a refusal to take the notion of reality too seriously as a metaphysical ground for action or meaning. In fact, ironists—like Critical Buddhists—may be more likely to accept the world, precisely because they are not burdened with the

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[20] See Richard Rorty, "Introduction: Relativism: Finding and Making," in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London, 1999), p. xxvii.

[21] In a critique of poststructuralist thinker Jacques Derrida, Rorty accuses his French peer of succumbing in his early work to what Rorty calls "word magic"—i.e., "hoping to find a word which cannot be banalized and metaphysicized by being used, which will somehow retain its 'instability' even after it becomes current"—what may be otherwise called the (vain) attempt to "eff the ineffable" (Richard Rorty, "From Ironist Theory to Private Allusions: Derrida," in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* [Cambridge, 1989], p. 124, n.6). According to Rorty, Derrida eventually overcame this "false start" by dropping all pretence of philosophical rigor and taking up a poetic approach, in the process developing a "new kind of writing."

[22] See Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, p. 158.

[23] See Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, where the concept of irony is discussed throughout.

[24] Jaffee, "Fessing Up in Theory," p. 330.

problem of figuring out exactly what it is "in itself," nor with finding some method to "make contact" with that reality. Moreover, ironists "realize that anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed [and are] always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency of and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves."[25]

What does this mean for a postmetaphysical Buddhist theory of language? José Cabezón rightly notes that all religions have struggled with language and its particular relations to religious truth and teachings.[26] The role of language within Buddhism has been a contentious issue since an early period—perhaps going back to the time of Śākyamuni himself. While Buddhism may have a leg up on Christianity in the race to get out of Platonism's shadow, the particular attention to *messages* is also underdeveloped in Buddhist speculation regarding the "dissolution" of "reality" that provides "liberation." Though it is often stated that language as scripture or doctrine—or in the Zen *kōan*—can *lead* to this liberation, language is most often conceived as a "means" towards a non-linguistic—that is to say, experiential—end.[27] Herein lie the roots of a pseudo-Kantian dilemma that is both philosophically unsolvable and, I would like to suggest, beside the point: how can something merely linguistic (or "material") penetrate or hook up with a non-linguistic, experiential truth? The insistence, found in early Indian and later Tibetan scholastic traditions, on a soteriological and salvific—or, in other words, pragmatic and dynamic—understanding of the Dharma clearly avoids the Platonist or onto-theological perspective in which language is merely a second-rate representation of reality. Yet, the scholastics tended to turn from this basic pragmatics not towards language itself but towards "experience" in the form of "mental states," in the process creating a second-order dualism and a whole new host of problems. They go on to ask: "how can the soteriologically valid experiences of an enlightened individual, experiences that—by virtue of being mental states—are nonmaterial, be coded into a material medium, language, and then decoded as the mental states of the adept?" Many if not most of the debates of Buddhist scholastics can be deemed irrelevant to Buddhist thought today because of their attachment to the dualism between "mental states" and "material language." Yet it is good to recall that the very

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25 Rorty, quoted in Walter Truett Anderson (ed.), *The Truth About the Truth* (New York, 1995), p. 172.

26 José Ignacio Cabezón, *Buddhism and Language: A Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism* (Albany, 1994), p. 2.

27 The famous Raft Analogy is the *locus classicus* for this perspective; the "raft" implying language itself or the Dharma as "doctrine" more broadly understood; see Cabezón, *Buddhism and Language*, p. 34; also p. 47; also Victor Hori's comments regarding the problem of understanding the Rinzai *kōan* in terms of a "means" towards a non-linguistic (i.e., experiential) end; Victor Hori, *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Kōan Practice* (Honolulu, 2003), pp. 7–9.

fact that these Buddhist scholastics struggled with questions of the relation of language to experiential reality—the soteriology of liberation from suffering—is a step in the right direction, one that clearly sees language as something more than simply an "explanation" of or "guide" towards proper belief, ritual, or moral behavior, but something that is somehow *causally* entwined with experience—and "reality"—itself.[28]

Against Gadamer, then, we must allow for the possibility of a "happy alienation." And this applies as much to Japan and Zen Buddhism as to the West. As Dale Wright argues, ideally, the Zen text:

> acts to evoke a disorientation, and then reorientation, of the reader's subjectivity. This is clearly the "otherness" of Zen language and Zen experience. To be in accord with this language, one must allow it to transport the self out of the posture of subjectivity—out of the ordinary and into an open space where one's prior socialization is rendered dysfunctional.[29]

In other words, it is to open oneself up to the transformative capacities of language—to so-called turning words—but without falling for simple word magic. This important dynamic of critical awareness, humility and openness to transformation via the linguistic medium is the first refuge of any postmetaphysical Buddhist criticism. Moreover, the *redescriptive* aspect of ironism opens up a path to take us from irony towards the more general and recognizably Buddhist notion of contingency, rooted in traditional doctrines of impermanence, emptiness, conditioned arising, and interdependence. Language plays an important role here, even in Buddhist traditions—such as Chan/Zen—noted for preaching apophatia.

Let us return to our analysis of Buddhist doctrine, and Zen doctrine more particularly, by reflecting on the Critical Buddhist critique of the Zen maxim that truth or Dharma is ultimately "beyond words and letters." In direct response to traditional understandings of the essence of Zen, Matsumoto writes: "[If t]he essence of Zen thought is the denial of conceptual thinking, or, perhaps better, the cessation of conceptual thinking," then "it is clear that any 'Zen thought' that teaches the 'cessation of thinking' is anti-Buddhist."[30] Thus, Matsumoto does not deny the accuracy of the common portrayal of Zen. Rather, he argues that Zen, as it has developed over eight centuries in Japan, has become profoundly anti-Buddhist, due largely to its conception of language *vis-à-vis* thought and awakening. This claim requires further investigation.

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[28] See Cabezón, *Buddhism and Language*, p. 22.

[29] Dale S. Wright, *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 97.

[30] Matsumoto Shirō, "The Meaning of 'Zen'," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 230.

The "problem" of language within Zen and Buddhist traditions more generally seems to have been an issue since an early period. One story in the Pali Canon has the Buddha explaining various kinds of self, concluding with the words: "But, Citta, these are merely names, expressions, turns of speech, designations in common use in the world, which the Tathagatha uses without misapprehending them."[31] A few centuries later, the *Diamond Sutra* proclaims: "The Tathagatha explains that X is [in fact] not X. He [just] calls it X"—suggesting that a buddha employs words, but unlike others does not cling to them.[32] And yet there is an undeniable distrust of language within the Mahāyāna stream of Buddhism, which reaches a head in the Chan/Zen traditions. Often, it seems, the most positive Zen evaluation of language renders it a necessary evil—merely a skillful means towards something else—i.e., the "experience" of awakening. Dale Wright notes the strange irony in the Chan/Zen admonitions against language use, and reading more specifically: "like many generations of Zen monks, we inherit it for contemplation primarily in *the act of reading*."[33] Moreover:

> If we look closely … we will see that the very opposition between the literary world and the world of immediate experience is itself a literary construct, one which functions to bolster the reality of immediate experience by tilting the antithesis against its own textual form. In this sense, Zen texts work on their readers to make the "real world" more real than it was before the act of reading.[34]

In Wright's reading, Zen language is much more than "merely" a skillful means pointing—like the legendary Zen finger—towards some extra-linguistic reality (whether the Dharma, emptiness, or awakening). Rather language, in the process of its self-denial, creates and shapes the world in which we dwell. Let us turn now to traditional Zen understandings of language *vis-à-vis* awakening and ethics, as well as Critical Buddhist responses to such.

The Zen teaching of *furyū moji* is, of course, itself an example of a "literary" doctrine that can only be expressed, formulated, amended, and propounded via language—and moreover via a language and concepts familiar to the acolyte. After all: "One cannot transcend language; that is, one cannot find a point of view outside of all linguistic frameworks from which the world will appear 'as it

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31 *Potthapaada Sutta, Digha Nikaya*, 9. 53.

32 Richard Hayes notes the errors of Edward Conze in translating this particular passage as "The Tathagatha declares that X is not X, therefore it's called X"—striking a chord of "paradox" so favored by modernist interpreters of Zen (Richard Hayes, *buddha-l* discussion list, February 15, 2004 [buddha-l@listserv.louisville.edu, accessed February 15, 2004]).

33 Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, p. 21, my emphasis.

34 Ibid.

is'. One cannot think without thinking in a language."[35] Beyond this simple fact, however, "beyond words and letters" (*furyū moji*) is a highly ambiguous doctrine, perhaps better called an epithet, warning, or even "performative utterance." The expression, usually translated as "no dependence on language and texts," was thought to have come directly from the lips of the legendary Bodhidharma himself. By the time of the flourishing of Chan in late Tang Dynasty China (i.e., the period of Huang Po) its use was widespread, even becoming in some cases the central defining characteristic of Zen as distinguished from other forms of Buddhism. Griffith Foulk notes that, at least from the ninth century, most channists accepted the slogan as orthodox, though they could not agree on what it meant.[36]

Moreover, there were occasional critiques of *furyū moji*, particularly emerging out of the practitioners of so-called "mind discernment" (Jp. *kanjin*) interpretation of the Tendai school. One text, the *Kankō ruijū*, goes so far as to suggest that "written words are not [merely] written words; language is liberation"[37]—and goes on to criticize both the rigid attachment to *and* the denial of the validity of written texts. The development of the Rinzai *kōan* tradition can be thought of in similar terms—as an attempt to use language to open up new ways of seeing without either denying or assuming it can lead to a non-linguistic experience or reality.[38] Bernard Faure notes that we would do better to understand the *furyū moji* doctrine as a rejection not of texts themselves or language *in toto* but rather as a critique of particular textual or interpretive practices. In this reading, *furyū moji* indicates a hermeneutical reformation more than an outbreak of anti-intellectualism. Yet—alas, Critical Buddhists would surely add—anti-intellectualism is what it has become, at least in most modern, post-Suzukian readings of Zen. And this has had practical, this-worldly effects. "This tendency is no doubt at least partially responsible for the eventual marginalization of Zen in China and elsewhere. Inability or unwillingness to reflect on what you do eventually leads to naive and narrow practices."[39]

According to Abe Masao, "not relying on words or letters" implies a "return to the source *prior to* words and letters, that is a return to Buddha's Mind as the source of the Buddhist Scripture."[40] The Critical Buddhists, and perhaps even

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35 Richard Rorty, "Realism, Categories, and the 'Linguistic Turn'," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 2 (1962): p. 310.

36 See T. Griffith Foulk, "The Ch'an School and Its Place in the Buddhist Monastic Tradition" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1987); also Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, p. 26.

37 Jacqueline Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu, 2001), p. 174.

38 See Sueki Fumihiko, "A Re-examination of Critical Buddhism," in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 331.

39 Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, p. 33.

40 Abe Masao, *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue* (Honolulu, 1995), p. 174.

Abe's mentor, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, who roundly criticized the "evil Zen of silent illumination," would be less than pleased with Abe's attempt to nuance this injunction:

> Since the Buddhist scripture is nothing but an outcome of Buddha's Mind, that is, Buddha's enlightenment, Zen requires us to go beyond the scripture and return to the Buddha Mind directly … [yet t]he Buddha Mind can be attained only through our own attainment of our own Buddha Mind, that is, our original nature.[41]

Here, as if confirming the argument of Matsumoto, Abe invokes *tathāgata-garbha* in support of *furyū-moji*. Elsewhere in the same collection of essays, Abe turns to the Mādhyamika doctrine of the two truths—*saṃvṛti-satya* (Jp. *seizokutai*) and *paramātha-satya* (Jp. *shōgitai*)—in order to further explicate his notion of Zen apophatia. *Saṃvṛti-satya* or conventional truth involves: "common sense, ethical judgement, and scientific knowledge, all of which are based on conceptual distinction and are constructed verbally." *Paramātha-satya* or ultimate truth, however, being nothing less than *śūnyatā* itself, is "completely free from conceptual distinction and beyond verbal expression."[42]

Moreover, these two realms, according to Abe, are not simply separate but equal: "From the point of view of ultimate truth, conventional or mundane truth, however true it may be in its own right, is nothing but ignorance and falsehood."[43] What seems to have happened here is a virtual coalescence of the Buddhist doctrine of two truths with what Western Christians call the two kingdoms theory, extending from Augustine to Luther. Is this an accurate representation of the Buddhist idea? Or is there a problem in Abe's emphasis on the real reality of ultimate truth over the illusionary reality of conventional truth?

Abe remains enough of a Mādhyamikan to be able to admit that ultimate truth, in one sense, *relies* upon conventional truth (citing the specific Sautrantikā doctrine of *vyavasthāpanā*), as it is only in the conventional world that ultimate truth can be expressed. He goes on to relate this connection to ethics: "In order to reach Emptiness, ethics must be realized as 'ignorance' and be turned over completely. However … [i]n its positive and affirmative aspect, in which Emptiness empties itself, ultimate truth expresses itself in the form of ethics and ethics is therefore re-established in the light of Emptiness."[44] Elsewhere, Abe asks the following: "We can reach Zen only by transcending speech and silence, affirmation and negation. But what is beyond speech and silence, beyond affirmation and negation? *That* is the question."[45] That is the question indeed—and it is one that takes us back to the father of the Linguistic Turn in Western thought, Ludwig Wittgenstein, who

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41 Ibid., p. 174.

42 Ibid., p. 200.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., p. 201.

45 Abe Masao, *Zen and Comparative Studies* (Honolulu, 1997), p. 24.

argued that all that is beyond speech is quite literally "nonsense." But Wittgenstein also notes that we would do well to pay attention to our nonsense.[46]

In response to concerns over the place of reason in reaching true awareness, Zen writers took several different paths. One group, which may be most representative, sought an alternative to reason and language in pre-linguistic immediacy, while others, setting off in another direction: "sought instead some form of non-objectifying language through which the experience of immediacy might be mediated. They sought a transformed rhetoric of 'live words' or 'turning words' through which awakening might be evoked. This understanding of Zen rhetoric best accounts for the focus on language in Zen texts."[47] This point is also noted by Maraldo: "However parsimonious Zen masters may be with words, it is not the case that language is always rejected in favor of non-linguistic action. The point is that, if practice supplies the foundation of the meaning of the linguistic expression, then *the linguistic expression must be carried out* to be 'understood'."[48]

Thus we are led back to the issue of *topos* as a ground for experience—understood, however, not as a spatially-oriented "pure experience" but rather in terms of emptiness, temporality, language, and praxis. The Stoics seem to have had an inkling of such an understanding:

> Stoic logic speaks of incorporeal meanings by means of which talk about things occurs (*to lekton*). It is highly significant that these meanings are put on the same level as *topos*—i.e., space. Just as empty space is first given to thought only by mentally removing the objects related to each other within it, so "meanings" as such are now conceived by themselves for the first time, and a concept is created for them by mentally removing the things that are named by the meaning of words. Meanings, too, are like a space in which things are related to one another.[49]

Here *topos* may be further redescribed along the lines of the "social self" introduced by George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) and more fully developed in linguistic terms by Jürgen Habermas. In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas, following Mead and Martin Buber, asserts that intersubjective communication—meeting or encounter in Gadamer's sense—is in fact the very basis of selfhood: selfhood is itself constructed and mediated *vis-à-vis* language, myths, metaphors,

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[46] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London, 1992), p. 27; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (New York, 1991), p. 92 (64e); see J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1975), p. 2, on the question of nonsense *vis-à-vis* the Linguistic Turn.

[47] Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, p. 105.

[48] John C. Maraldo, "The Hermeneutics of Practice in Dōgen and Francis of Assisi: An Exercise in Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," *Eastern Buddhist, New Series*, 14/2 (1981): p. 33, my emphasis.

[49] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 433.

and symbols. The work of Mead, Buber, and Habermas represents an important and significant break with the Cartesian paradigm of the solitary ego in contemplation; it is, in effect, "a *linguistic turn* away from Cartesian subjectivist theories of consciousness, which situate the locus [*basho*/*topos*] of personhood in an isolated ego-self, towards an *intersubjective* model based on the notion of symbolically mediated communicative interaction between individuals in a society."[50]

Such a notion of selfhood has clear and obvious parallels in Buddhist thought, and as we have seen, a similar notion of the self as "betweenness" (*aidagara*) was developed by Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1961), a modern Japanese philosopher who worked on the margins of the Kyoto School. Watsuji employs the Mahāyāna doctrines of emptiness and *pratītya-samutpāda*, in particular, to undermine the substantialism of the Cartesian self. The emphasis shifts away from the self as subject-against-the-other/world to the actual ties or connections that mediate between self and other/world. More importantly, the underlying point here is that the self is always *contextual*—mediated not only by relations to the world, but made meaningful, grounded, we might say, in language and communication. Unfortunately, Watsuji himself, as with Nishida and others of the Kyoto School, felt compelled to give this notion explicit relation to the imperial ideology of wartime Japan, effectively collapsing the tension between self and other into a merging of self with the absolute totality of the Emperor, nation-family (*kokka*) or national essence (*kokutai*).[51] Nishida developed a similar notion in terms of the "I-Thou" relationship, through which, "having encountered the other and returned to oneself, one no longer describes oneself by negating the other, but reaches the awareness that both self and other are 'located' together." At that moment, Ueda Shizuteru explains, "one ceases to think of the 'I' as a fixed substance and realizes it as a unique perspective from which to describe a given context."[52] Yet, like Watsuji, Nishida pushed the I-Thou relationship further so that it effectively results in a merging of identities, whereby: "At the bottom of the I there stands a Thou, and at the bottom of the Thou the I." In the case of both Watsuji and Nishida, there is little recognition of the "radical otherness" of the other, which would allow for the possibility of contingency within intersubjective relations. "This is to say that the chiasm with others can never be reduced to a transparent mutuality of intersubjectivity."[53]

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50 Steve Odin, "The Social Self in Japanese Philosophy and American Pragmatism: A Comparative Study of Watsuji Tetsurō and George Herbert Mead," *Philosophy East and West*, 42 (1992): p. 489.

51 Ibid., p. 491; Sakai Naoki, "Return to the West/Return to the East: Watsuji Tetsuro's Anthropology and Discussions of Authenticity," *Boundary 2*, 18/3 (1991): pp. 189–90.

52 Ueda Shizuteru, "Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question," in James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo (eds), *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu, 1994), p. 105, n.63.

53 Sakai, "Return to the West," p. 184.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty developed an understanding of selfhood based less on an ontological ground than upon experience itself, in particular one's experience with others:

> The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears. It is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which find their unity when I either take up my past experiences in those of the present, or other peoples' in my own.[54]

Emmanuel Lévinas provides us with a similar version of intersubjective *topos* that seems well suited to the task of Critical Buddhism—in that it insists upon the priority of ethics over being or totality in the foundation of selfhood and knowledge. Central to Lévinas's thesis is, once again, the element of (critical) distance or separation that was discussed above in relation to Gadamer and Ricoeur:

> Without separation there would not have been truth; there would have been only being. Truth, a lesser contact than tangency, in the risk of ignorance, illusion, and error, does not undo "distance," does not result in the union of the knower and the known, does not issue in totality. Despite the thesis of the philosophy of existence, this contact is not nourished from a prior enrootedness in being. The quest for truth unfolds in the opposition of forms. The distinctive character of forms is precisely the epiphany of a distance.[55]

Here the "self" that is constructed, shaped, and reformed through our encounters with the past, present, and especially in the face of others may be nothing more or less than what has elsewhere been called Buddha-nature, or perhaps, *kuśala dharma*.[56] Moreover, the situation (or *topos*) which grounds the possibility of relations between self and the other is language itself. As John Wild notes, the sense of self and other developed by Lévinas: "means less interest in conceptual constructions and a greater readiness to listen and learn from experience. It [does] not think of knowing, in the sense of gathering, as the primary aim of man from which action will follow as a matter of course, but rather of action and of the achievement of justice and peace as prior to speaking and thinking."[57] Rather than the ground for being or experience (or even "awakening"), *topos* is here the condition for ethical practice in the world. As Lévinas himself put it: "To speak

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[54] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London, 2002), p. xx.

[55] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh, 1969), pp. 60–61.

[56] See also Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (2nd edn, London, 1984), p. 216, on "narrative selfhood"; James W. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School* (Honolulu, 2001), p. 167.

[57] Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 16.

is to make the world common, to create commonplaces"[58]—a phrase strikingly reminiscent of Vico.

Huayan (Jp. *Kegon*) Buddhism has developed this idea in a fruitful fashion. According to Kegon teachings, there are four principal stages of interpretation:

1. The *ji* or "thing" perspective; i.e., the common-sense point of view where things exists independently;
2. The *ri* or "principle" perspective, which grasps the underlying reality or principle behind the changing multiplicity of everyday phenomena;
3. The *ri-ji* or "relation of principle to thing" perspective, which involves the awareness of an underlying principle in each individual thing; i.e., that each thing is a manifestation of the underling reality/principle;
4. The *ji-ji* or "thing to thing" perspective, wherein one sees the whole universe as the interrelatedness of individuals and not as some underlying substratum or unperceived principle.

It is the final stage here that is unique to the Kegon view, and which connects it most strongly with the traditional Japanese tendency to "concretize" metaphysics as much as possible.[59] For here we have a "pragmatic" admission of the reality of what lies before us—a reality in which we are enmeshed, but from which we should not try to escape by resorting to some kind of "beyond" principle.

Yet, as many critics were aware at the time of its development, the Kegon system is not without flaws, not least of which was a tendency to get wrapped up in arcane metaphysical matters to the detriment of practice. In this regard, it may be best to forego an attempt to construct an old or new metaphysical foundation stone for the goal of Critical Buddhism: ethics and social justice. While critical or deconstructive analysis helps us to see through the delusions and problems of metaphysical constructs, we should perhaps state frankly that, while the matter is not simply "beyond words and letters," it may be one that falls outside of the traditional domain of metaphysics, whether of the Greek or Indian variety. Here, again, the work of Lévinas provides fertile soil, for one of the main conclusions of his own work on ethics is that, while siding with contemporary critiques of traditional metaphysics (e.g., that of Heidegger), we should come to understand that:

> The ethical question does not merely contrast with the question of essence, as if onto-theological and ethical questions operated on the same horizon …; they are not on the same plane. Moreover, the question of essence—"What is ethics?"—

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[58] Ibid., p. 76.

[59] See H. Gene Blocker and Christopher L. Starling, *Japanese Philosophy* (Albany, 2001), p. 32.

> positively and precisely *excludes* the force of the ethical question. It collapses the "what ought to be" of ethics into the "what is" of ontology.[60]

In short, for Lévinas, ethics occurs prior to essence and being—conditioning them. This has nothing whatever to do with a transcendent God or Buddha-nature (which he would likely see as onto-theology pushed back to another degree), but because ethics "does not have an essence, its 'essence', so to speak, is precisely to unsettle essences. Its 'identity' is precisely not to have an identity, to undo identities. Its 'being' is not to be but to be *better than being*. Ethics is precisely ethics by disturbing the complacency of being (or of non-being, being's correlate)."[61] Here, again, we have an understanding of ethics that begins to sound remarkably similar both to traditional readings of emptiness and to the above redescription of Critical Buddhist ethics *vis-à-vis* language and *topos*.

The Dharma of radical contingency, when fully realized by those committed to ironism, disturbs the complacency of common-sense understandings of both "self" and "world." The question remains, however, as to the extent this implies a practicable basis for ethics or social engagement. As in Rorty's work, one important question arising from a postmetaphysical Buddhist critique of language in light of irony and contingency is the place of language in shaping ethics and communities of social justice. Rorty's own reluctant conclusion is to firmly separate the "private ironizing" that affirms contingency and self-overcoming from the commitment to social justice, or "liberal hope" that must be built and sustained by other, literary means.[62] Rorty's reasoning for this—very American—distinction between private edification and public commitment is rooted in an admirable wariness of any sort of Philosopher King. In practice, he argues, those best attuned to ironism make terrible or dangerous public figures, whereas those most suited for work towards eliminating suffering are less inclined towards the criticism and radical skepticism that goes hand in hand with the ironist stance. In line with the above invocation of Lévinas, I would suggest that a truly critical and constructive Buddhism cannot afford to rest in such a dualism, and that in fact it is precisely a Buddhist understanding of *contingency*—particularly the contingency of identity—that can provide the necessary link between irony and solidarity.

One way to draw this out is to return to the famous Zen maxim regarding the "emptiness of emptiness" (Sk. *śūnyāta śūnyāta*; Jp. *kū ga kū*). This phrase can be interpreted in a number of ways. Abe reads it as indicating: "true Emptiness is wondrous Being, absolute *u*, fullness and suchness of everything, *tathāgata*, ultimate reality"[63]—a paean to the plenitude of vacuity that must be countered by an alternative reading whereby what is implied is the emptiness of the

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60 Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 9.

61 Ibid.

62 See Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*.

63 Abe Masao, "Non-Being and *Mu*: The Metaphysical Nature of Negativity in the East and the West," *Religious Studies*, 11/2 (1975): pp. 187–8.

realization of emptiness itself. In short, emptiness upheld (i.e., realized) as a doctrine or an element of cognition must be further *real*-ized in the experience of emptiness in the physical/phenomenal world—and in society, with others. Frits Staal explains this with regard to the distinction between the doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyāta-drsti*) and concentration on emptiness (*śūnyāta-samādhi*), citing a Chinese text in which the Buddha says to Ānanda: "I regard a person who adheres to the doctrine of emptiness as incurable. If someone believes that there is a personality, be it as large as Mount Sumeru, I am not surprised and I do not blame him. But if some idiot believes in the doctrine of emptiness, be it as small as the sixteenth part of a single hair, I cannot tolerate it."[64] We might also note in this regard Zen admonitions such as: "*Kū ni shizumi jaku ni taisu*" (Sunk in emptiness and caught in tranquility; erroneously attached to the meditation on emptiness) and "*Kū ni shitagae ba kū ni somoku*" (Seeking to accord with voidness, one contradicts it).[65] The practice or experience of emptiness is not, in this sense, beyond language or conception, nor does it lead to anywhere. "Not only is there no ontological end as such but even the very concept of *śūnyāta* is empty … [it is] simply a designation, a means of communication."[66] Similarly, commenting on the concluding frames of the well-known twelfth century Zen parable of the Ox and His Herdsman (Jp. *jūgyūzu*), Robert Carter notes that precisely "Because reality is ultimately without distinction, all distinctions have now become ultimately real in and of themselves."[67]

Still, when all is said and done, it appears that it is the last of these three jewels that requires the most in the way of redescription—or what Rorty calls *Verwindung*: "turning to new purposes." Solidarity must be reinscribed with a greater sense of commitment to the suffering of others, which can of course be grounded in the bodhisattva vow of the Mahāyāna, or in an extension of the traditional virtues of *ahiṃsā* and loving-kindness. In addition, as is argued by the Critical Buddhists, any process of Buddhist development with respect to social justice implies a greater recognition not only of language but of history—more specifically the various historically rooted causes and conditions that have shaped and molded Buddhist traditions, for better or worse.

Rorty rejects all attempts to "unite a striving for perfection with a sense of community" on the grounds that such are inevitably based on "metaphysical" or "theological" assumptions about a "common human nature." This, I believe, is an unwarranted assumption, at least with respect to a particular reading of the many forms of Buddhism that push us to realize that, as Rorty argues, there may be "nothing 'beneath' socialization or prior to history which is definatory of the

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64 Frits Staal, *Exploring Mysticism: A Methodological Essay* (Berkeley, 1975), p. 160.

65 Inagaki Hisao, *A Glossary of Zen Terms* (Kyoto, 1991), p. 213.

66 Glyn Richards, "*Śūnyatā*: Objective Referent or Via Negativa," *Religious Studies*, 14 (1978): p. 254.

67 Robert E. Carter, *Nothingness Beyond God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nishida Kitarō* (St. Paul, 1997), p. 128.

human"[68]—but which also provide techniques intended to deconstruct the structures of "private edification" that certain ironists might pursue in lieu of ethics.

In short, within the main trunk of several of the most significant Buddhist thought traditions lie a number of the same metaphysical dualisms (i.e., between language and experience, thought and feeling, noumena and phenomena) that the West has been struggling with for over a century. In particular, what Cabezón calls the "mentalistic and idealistic tendencies of Buddhist exegetes" need to be re-examined and reconsidered.[69] One way to do this is to begin to speak of language—and human being more generally—in terms of the three postmetaphysical jewels of irony, contingency, and solidarity. Though Critical Buddhists have relied on Descartes, this is in one sense to bring another—albeit very different—paradigm "modern" theorist into the Buddhist picture: Charles Darwin. The evolutionary theory pioneered by Darwin (which, of course, is not to be mistaken for the decidedly un-Buddhistic Social Darwinism) correlates well with core aspects of Buddhist teaching, in particular the notion that sentient organisms are constantly undergoing transformations by virtue of their needs, their environment, and the vagaries of random genetic mutation (i.e., contingency). And the Darwinian picture need not be reduced to vulgar materialism, since social, cultural, and linguistic factors will have indelible conditioning effects upon our own species of featherless biped.[70] From a Buddhist perspective, one advantage of such a picture is the fact that it dispenses with the image of the human mind within which is located the Cartesian or Buddhist solitary knower, along with the whole raft of philosophical problems associated with that mind/Self being either in or out of touch with reality itself. Moreover, it resituates humans, and perhaps all sentient beings to some degree, within a complex causal network of interdependence.[71]

There is also, however, a critical dimension that Buddhist thought can add to this picture. The particular emphasis on causality and contingency provides Buddhist thought with a distinctly critical and self-reflective edge. Along with the Critical Buddhists, Dale Wright locates the radicality of Buddhism not within the concepts of emptiness or *nirvāṇa* but rather in the fundamental idea of *pratītya-samutapāda*. In addition to a radical reinterpretation (or disavowal) of *karma* and adherence to the bodhisattva vow of compassion, it is within *pratītya-samutapāda* and the broader implications of contingency that a truly Critical Buddhism must find its home. Wright argues that unlike the modern European focus on epistemological concerns, Buddhists envision: "a systematic distortion that pervades all human understanding. Rather than establishing a framework for

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68 Richard Rorty, "Introduction," in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge, 1989), p. xiii.

69 Cabezón, *Buddhism and Language*, p. 46.

70 For an extended encomium on Darwin's place as a prime instigator of the "linguistic turn"—and a critique of the tendency of his heirs in philosophy to forget important aspects of his message, see Rorty, "Truth without Correspondence," pp. 64–8.

71 Rorty, "Introduction: Relativism," p. xxiii.

the discrimination of truth and falsity, Buddhists entertain the possibility that the frameworks we employ for the process of securing truth are themselves subject to the distorting impacts of desire and ignorance."[72]

Another way of putting this is to suggest, with Buddhism, that our very conception or selfhood—including the language we use to describe ourselves and our solitariness—are themselves deeply conditioned by social and political, as well as psychological—factors. Rorty attributes our growing sensitivity to the specifically ideological implications of the constructed "self" to the work of Michel Foucault.[73] And yet Buddhist thinkers have been making a similar point for several millennia, though admittedly in a less overtly politicized fashion. To be more open about speaking "truth to power" is something critical Buddhists could learn from Foucault. And finally, Buddhism can and should extend this to work against what Rorty has called "the residual essentialism of common sense."[74] To do so would be to relinquish the temptation—so common to world religions—to escape from time and chance.[75] It would also be to follow the Zen warning not to be as "a worm stuck in the mud" (*deiri no kyūin*)—i.e., the "mud" of unconditioned *satori* or "pure experience."[76]

72 Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, p. 137.

73 Richard Rorty, "Globalization, the Politics of Identity and Social Hope," in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London, 1999), p. 236.

74 Richard Rorty, "A World without Substances or Essences," in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London, 1999), p. 58

75 Ibid., pp. 60–61.

76 Hori, *Zen Sand*, p. 21.

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